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SIEGE

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SIEGE

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SUCCESS, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES
FROM THE PHOTOPLAY
A UNIVERSAL-JEWEL PRODUCTION

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SIEGE

CHAPTER ONE

Down the broad avenue leading to the bridge the barouche rolled majestically. A truly elegant barouche it was, drawn frettingly by what earlier generations would have called "a spanking pair of blacks." A third black drove them, grandly sober in maroon and the gleam of a tall hat. The turnout pre-empted the middle of the road, thus obliging automobiles meeting it on their way homeward from the newly established Country Club to sheer far over toward the edge, which evolution they performed with plenty of margin to spare. Even when the equipage took the straitened bridgeway it maintained its vantage as of divine right; then the humbled creatures of mere mechanism must slow down to a creep, hugging the massive stone rails.

All this seemed to the various car owners, chauffeurs, and casual operatives quite proper and natural, if inconvenient, since the superb and anachronistic carriage belonged to the Ruylands and it was Ruyland politics that had established the roadway, Ruyland generosity that had built the bridge, Ruyland backing that supported the Country Club to which the avenue gave access, and Ruyland overlordship that had attached the Ruyland name to all of them.

In the barouche sat the fine flower of Ruylandism.

"Let 'em out, Carter," she directed as the bridge was passed.

"Yassum, Mis' Ruylan'," answered the tall old negro worshipfully.

As the high steppers gave over their caracoling and settled down to the level of speed, she tilted her head back a little and drew in the early summer softness with a strong lust of living that sent the quick color flushing through her face. A face of beauty, even of splendor, in its own type. The lines were firmly molded below the lustrous hair. Pride and courage and humor were readable in the delicate mouth, firm over small and even teeth. The chin was non-significant and soft, a humanizing touch to a magnificence which might otherwise have been too rigid. She sat erect and easy. As a sailor gives to the dip and plunge of the washed deck, so she yielded her form, unconsciously graceful, to the lurch of the vehicle as it took the curves.

Everything about her was of the superlative degree of fineness—turnout, clothes, hair, teeth—all from the best markets in the world except the keenly luminous eyes, her own and undimmed by seventy years of eager if cynical contemplation of life. She looked almost her age and was insolently content to be herself without evasion. What, indeed, could the years do to her!

"Why are you slowing up, Carter?" she asked presently.

"Temp'r'ry bridge acrost Shangamawket Creek, Mis' Ruylan'," said the coachman, with an effect of apologizing for it.

The rapid honking of a horn behind them mingled with his explanation. A car was desirous of reaching the narrow way ahead of them. Ill-advisedly, Carter turned his head, to be met with a chill glance and the reproof:

"Pay attention to your horses, man!"

"Yassum, Mis' Ruylan'; yassum, ma'am. I reckoned it sounded lak the way Mist' Kennion blow his hawn."

"Did it, indeed! My nephew's haste can hardly be vitally important even to himself."

"Yassum," assented the servitor.

"Honk-honk! *Honk!* Honk-honk-honk! H-O-N-K-honk!" blared the car behind in the accents of indignation.

The fine flower of the Ruylands showed a slightly enhanced color, as the horses clattered upon the bridge, thereby shutting off the clamorous motor from any hope of passing. "Drive slowly, Carter," she directed. "Drive *quite* slowly."

"Yassum, Mis' Ruylan'." Inwardly Carter reflected: "That Mist' Kennion boy must have fool-in-the-haid to try 'n' hustle Mis' Ruylan'; that's whut that boy got!"

After one more faltering appeal, the automobile gave it up and trundled behind at a wheelbarrow pace, occasionally voicing a perfunctory "Snaw-w-w-w-wk!" of protest. But at the far end it pushed so smartly past the obstacle that it actually brushed the overhanging shield of the barouche. "Br-r-ra-a-a-a-h!" trumpeted the horn. The occupant of the barouche turned neither head nor eye. She merely smiled thinly. The smile faded as a girl's voice, very clear and with an intonation not to be misconstrued, floated back to her: "Thank you *so* much." And at the same moment Kennion Ruyland's polite "Good afternoon, aunt."

"Look where you're going, you fool."

The retort was directed to the girl who was at the wheel. The girl looked, gave a strangled cry, and threw all her young strength upon the wheel, twisting it far to the right. A fuzzy cat, loping out from the wayside ditch with something in its mouth, had run under the car, followed by a little, lean, wailing, gingham-clad girl. There was a light shock. The driver of the car jammed on her brakes as she turned, squirmed out from behind

the wheel, and precipitated herself into the roadway as swiftly as Kennion Ruyland unfolded his lank legs and landed, on his side. The pair of blacks reared and shied away from the apparition which had alighted almost under their startled noses. But she paid no heed. Dropping to her knees, she peered fearfully beneath the car. Nothing was to be seen except her companion's strained face on the other side. She rose and ran to the rear. There, hideously crumpled over to one side, like an injured spider, the child was racking and hitching her way to the refuge of the ditch, driven by the blind, piteous instinct of the fugitive to get away from that which had hurt it. At the edge of the grass the girl overtook her, snatched her into strong arms, cradled her, brooded over her. "Oh, baby, baby! Have I killed you?"

"It hurts," whimpered the little one.

"Where does it hurt?"

She pressed her two hands to her side and looked up into the brilliant, tremulous face above her. "There."

"Let me see."

"Where's my mousie?" quavered the child. "The bad cat had it."

Out from the dust of the road where it had been dropped the mouse dragged itself toward the haven of the ditch. In ludicrous and heart-breaking travesty of its little mistress, the tiny creature humped and sprangled until it reached the grass. The injured child saw it.

"My mousie! Get it for me."

Kennion Ruyland picked it up. It struggled feebly. "Its back is broken," he said gently. "I'd better kill it."

"No, no, no!" shrieked the child. "Give me my mousie! Oh, I hate you! I hate you! I'll always hate you!" She buried her face against the neck of the young girl, groping with her free hand for her pet. The man closed the questing fingers around it.

"We'll take her to the hospital," he said to his companion. "Give her to me."

"No," denied the child, clinging.

"You drive, Kennion," directed the girl. "I'll hold her."

As the young man settled himself to the wheel a steady and quiet voice from the barouche said, with an indefinable accent of threat: "If the child dies, I'll see that justice is done upon you, young woman."

"It was my fault, aunt," claimed Kennion.

"How your fault?" came the disdainful query.

"I grabbed the wheel."

"Oh, don't stop to lie to her now," cried the girl. "Let's get to the hospital."

Eight minutes later the Ruyland Memorial Hospital admitted an injured child and a dead mouse.

When Kennion Ruyland emerged, the barouche was blocking his car, which he had backed into an embrasure.

"Get out of my way, Carter," he ordered, climbing to the seat.

"Yassuh," assented the negro with ready lip-service, but making no motion toward the lines. Feeling the bright and savage eyes behind him boring into his back, he knew too much to do so.

"Kennion."

"Tell that d—d nigger of yours to go ahead, Aunt Augusta."

"Who was that young woman?"

"That girl is Fredericka Gage."

"She's painted."

"Oh, for God's sake, Aunt Augusta! I want to get to Dr. Stanley."

"Is the child's condition serious?"

"No. But they may have to operate. And I want the best man."

"Dr. Corney of the hospital staff is perfectly competent. Before having him appointed surgeon I made inquiries which satis—"

With a snarl of profanity he jumped down and advanced upon the horses to swing them aside. Augusta Ruyland said no word. But her hand moved to and gripped the long carriage whip in front of her; her eyes were glittering threats. For a moment the young man stood uncertain, between shame and fury, then whirled about, sprinted across the lawn, and swung himself to the step of a passing trolley. His aunt, watching him with grim regard, settled herself in her seat to wait. Patience, if one might judge from the expression on her face, was more than a virtue with her; it was an enjoyment. It brought its own reward in the course of a few minutes when the responsible author of the accident appeared in the doorway. At once she ran over to the carriage.

"She's all right," she announced eagerly. "There's no permanent injury, though the shoulder has to be carefully handled."

"Who are you?"

The girl drew back, stiffening. "I beg your pardon."

"I said: 'Who are you?'"

The face into which the old lady haughtily stared changed subtly. A small smile flickered about the lips.

"You mean 'Who the hell are you,' don't you?"

Eye met eye in appraisal and challenge, and those of youth were not brighter nor bolder than those of age.

"Ah! Now I appreciate *what* you are, at least."

The girl shook her tawny head. "Don't be too quick to jump to conclusions," she advised. Then, to herself: "Oh, *where* is Kennion?"

"I believe that he went for a wholly superfluous surgeon—in a trolley."

"In a—" The girl's glance fell upon the blockaded runabout. "What's the matter with his car?"

"There was not room to pass. And I did not choose to make room until certain questions had been satisfactorily answered."

"I'd have run you down," asserted the other in a flat, matter-of-fact tone.

"A habit of yours, apparently."

The shot went deep. Color ebbed momentarily from the upturned face. "You must be Kennion's Aunt Augusta. I hadn't thought of it before."

"I am Mrs. Hasleton Ruyland."

"Of course. Nobody else would do a thing like that."

"Am I to infer that some person has been describing my character for your benefit?"

"I've certainly heard of you."

"From whom, may I ask?"

"It might be almost any one, mightn't it? You must be much discussed."

"My grandnephew? Answer me!"

Quite gravely the catechized one raised her right hand to the level of her ear, the palm toward Mrs. Ruyland. "The witness being duly sworn—"

"So you've been in the witness box. Doubtless as prisoner." The stroke was swift and perhaps surer than the enemy at first realized. "And the charge? Manslaughter? Or only reckless driving?"

Again the girl flinched. This foe was formidable, and only too patently a foe. While she sought for a retort a lank, loose-jointed figure came hurrying across the lawn. Relief flashed into her eyes.

"Here's Kennion!"

"Kennion? What is my nephew to you?"

"Why not ask him?"

"Where did you ever chance to meet him?" pursued

the old woman. The disparagement in the tone made the implication plain enough: where could such a creature as you have become so well acquainted with the nephew of Mrs. Hasleton Ruyland?

The girl chose to answer the subsurface query. Her gaze became artfully limpid, childlike, ingenuous.

"Oh," she cooed, "I picked him up in a road-house."

And this was true.

CHAPTER TWO

It had happened three weeks before at the House in the Park. Jazzy music filled the air with clamor. Jazzy people were scattered thinly among the scores of small tables, watching others writhe and wriggle together on the slippery floor, for it was the year when fashions in dancing were at their most grotesque. The scene was one of light and revelry, of youth and gayety freed from the shackles of convention and relaxed in the atmosphere of true Bohemianism; a legend at the top of the menu, which lay on the corner table before the long, lean, lone young man, told the world that it was all that, in so many words. The immediate world gave him the impression of laboring conscientiously if painfully to live up to it. It made him feel old and stale. When one feels old and stale at twenty-six it usually means that one is bored. The long, lean, lone young man was bored. For relief from the atmosphere of true Bohemianism he bent toward the window, outside which a vast spread of wistaria wreathed its blossoming tentacles, and expanded his chest with a deep intake of mingled fried onions and expensive perfumery. The draught was moving the wrong way.

"Breath-of-New-York," he muttered. "How the devil did I ever get here?"

It was a rhetorical question. He had come in a taxi because he had nothing else to do that he specially wanted to do, and the evening was hot, and the Park looked deceptively cool. In point of fact, there was seldom anything to do that he specially wanted to do. Certainly

he didn't want to be there at that table. Nothing on the bill of fare impressed him much except the prices. He had a healthy and quite un-American distaste for being swindled, and chicken croquettes at the price of ortolan's tongues seemed to him very much on that order. Inertia alone prevented him from getting out of the place. He was excessively bored.

Presently he was glad that he hadn't. Amusement promised. It came in the form of a whirlwind aggregation that swept in, rushed three tables together, anticipating the assistance of the hurrying and protestant waiters, and flopped into the chairs which its members had rifled from their proper places. A queerly assorted company it was, consisting of five youths and one girl. All were in evening dress, the youths in the extreme of white waistcoats and ties, the girl a blade of glowing flesh sheathed in black. Two of the lot were wilted; one was drunk; yet they brought with them a refreshment of the devitalized atmosphere. The lone diner in the corner caught, or thought he caught, a clear whiff of the wistaria momentarily dominant over the onion-and-perfumery reek.

The girl was saying: "No; not for me, Flicker. And Bobby's had enough. Horse's neck for mine." The commonplace words were distinguished by a strange undulant rhythm of enunciation, suggesting—what? The slow swell of waves on a smooth beach? No. The even breath of breezes among verdure? Not quite that either. Ah! He had it now. Swallow's flight; the swoop and lift of it translated into sound.

"Whose dance?" she said, and the words themselves stretched upon their toes and were expectant. A broken chorus of claims answered. The girl flapped desperate hands at her concealed ears. "Oh, oh! Stop it! Somebody got dice? High throw takes me."

"It was my next when we broke up the party," complained a footballish giant.

"Then you get first throw. But we didn't break up the party."

"Didn't we! Maybe you think that five men and the pick of the girls, right out of the middle of the evening—"

"Mabel will be furious. You oughtn't to have all come."

"You dared us."

"Poor little weaklings!" she derided them. "Daren't refuse a dare; 'fraid of being bum sports."

"That's a rotten way to put it," objected the youth called Flicker. "A man can't be a perfect gent *all* the evening. Roll high, you high rollers!" He flung them out with a flourish, following their course with snapping fingers. Something was wrong with his magic. The dice turned up a three and an ace. "Oh, hell," he murmured disconsolately.

"This is it," decided the girl. "High throw, first dance, and then he goes back to Mabel's. Next highest, next dance, and he follows."

"What about the survivor?" demanded a small blond Adonis. "He brings you back?"

"He takes me home."

"What!" "Step off it!" "You're not going to shake us that way." "Mabel will give us the everlasting razz-dazz." "Why, it ain't midnight yet."

Above the broken chorus rose the triumph of Flicker. "Wouldn't sell my li'l' four for a thousand dollars."

But the protests continued until the girl put a stop to them with an imperative: "No, no, *no!* It's either that or we all go back now."

Amusedly the onlooker wondered at her easy tyranny. Thus, he reflected, a Du Barry might have overmistrusted

it among the adorers of her beauty, a Manon in her lesser degree, a Lalage over her poets, an Aspasia with her philosophers, a Cleopatra among her courtiers, and so backward along the line of imperious beauties to the first tyrant Lilith. But this girl was not beautiful; not by any standards of his knowledge. The mouth was too wide, the face too foreshortened, the eyes too drooping. Yet there was something in her personality that stood out like flame in darkness, illuminating all around it; something which he groped to define, as he had sought for a simile for her speech. Again he had it. It was a robustness not of physique, but rather of femininity. There was in it no grossness, no effort of appeal. The quality was effluent from her as the odor from a sun-impregnated flower.

It was then that he began to sketch her surreptitiously on the back of the menu card.

Quite useless, he well knew, to attempt to fix that special quality of hers. Yet, though it were only an idle and picturesque memory to preserve, he wanted it.

Meantime, amidst an intensity of interest, all had made their throws, and there was open lamentation from the unfortunate Flicker, for the unsteady member known as Bobby had, after breathing alcoholically upon the dice, turned up a pair of aces. At once there were objections, not over-considerate of the winner's personal feelings.

"He's too pickled to take you home." "You'll *have* to come back to the party, now." "Let's throw again to see who waits with him." "That was only one round, anyway; it ought to be horses."

"Don't be stupid," adjured the girl. "I can take care of Bobby. I've done it before, haven't I? And some of the rest of you too," she added witheringly.

The subject of the reflections upon his capacity as an

escort rose to his feet, took a long, slow drink of ice water, set foot to a crack, walked it accurately and with extreme care to the center of the floor and returned, amidst cheers. He addressed himself solely to the girl, "How's that?"

"Perfectly all right."

He then swept the table with a contemptuous look. "S-s-s-scum!" he barked, and lapsed into contented silence.

Dancing, the girl afforded to the sketcher view after view of profile, full face, and every other angle, until, after disgustedly setting aside half a dozen failures (for which he had denuded the neighboring tables of menus), he realized with a thrill that he had caught something of the poise of her head and shoulders. Further, he perceived that she knew what he was doing, saw her chin go up a little, guessed that she was taking what she regarded as her most effective pose. It wasn't. He switched to the gracious curve of her arm, and got it in one long, diminishing stroke. For a time she seemed to be disregarding him wholly; then, when all her escorts but the fortunate survivor had reluctantly departed, he became aware that she was going to accost him. What should be his rôle? Culprit, with ready apology? Or artist, secure in the inalienable right of the cult to seize upon charm and grace, wherever found, for trans-proprietation to the general interest? At the second circling of the floor she stopped with her partner. The youth stepped forward. It was at once evident that, whatever his condition, he was reliably a gentleman. His charm was almost as palpable in its way as the girl's. When he spoke it was with a determined, though not wholly successful, effort at voice control. "Beg pardon, but you've been—unh!—drawing a picture?"

"Yes."

"Mind showin' it to—interestin'—unh!—interested stranger?"

"It's quite unfinished."

"Haffa doz'n pictures," commented the youth in well-bred surprise, glancing at the table. "Very pretty, but not finished, eh?"

The girl was standing aloof, facing outward toward the dancing floor. Now she turned. The sketcher at once clambered to his feet, upsetting the nearest chair. The girl smiled.

"'S beautiful, this one," pursued her escort, fingering the least successful effort of the lot. "Give you—unh!—fifty dollars for it."

"It's not for sale," replied the other, good-humoredly.

"Beg your pardon. See you're—unh!—distinguished amateur."

"Not even that."

"Run away, Bobby." The cool assurance of the girl's speech introduced a new element.

"All right, if you say so. But lemme—unh!—present—" He turned courteously to the other man. "Beg pardon, but I didn't get your name."

"Run away, Bobby," repeated the girl without change of emphasis.

Off trotted the faithful one with a doglike look of loyalty.

"You say they're not for sale?"

The sketcher laughed. "They have no value." Drawing out a chair, he said: "May I offer you—"

"Nothing, thank you. You sit down. Please."

"Slavish obedience seems to be what you specialize in. Therefore—" And he sat.

She swiftly selected that one of the discarded experi

ments upon which he had first worked. "Do you mind? If you'd shade a little more, just under the turn of the chin. There."

"Like that?"

"Carry it around further. You've tried to make me pretty. I'm not pretty."

"Aren't you?" he responded absently, stroking carefully with his pencil.

"Can't you see I'm not?"

"Yes. You don't need to be."

"I rather like that. Though it doesn't sound much like a compliment, does it? Don't you see, now, how much better that is?"

"You're right. You know something about drawing, yourself. Have you sat?"

"Sat? Oh, yes." She put on an impertinently English accent. "What price the little skit now?"

He leaned back to look up at her speculatively. "Oh, the usual would bring it."

"Really?"

"And truly."

She bent and kissed him on the mouth.

"That's what I'd call an honest, square, businesslike, value-given-and-received kiss," he observed, putting the picture into her hand.

"What did you expect?"

"Not so much, certainly. I've been overpaid."

"That's banal. I didn't think you'd be banal."

"Why not?"

"Your looks," she flashed back. "I'm disappointed."

"In your bargain?"

"No. Not in the picture."

"I am, though. I haven't got it. Not half of it. Not a tenth of it."

"You've got something of me," she mused. "And something else that isn't me. I wonder what you meant. I wonder why you put it in."

"If you'll tell me what you think it is—"

Her strong brows quivered. "I'm not sure that I know. If I do—"

"Well?"

"I shouldn't tell you now."

"Now?" he repeated. "Then there's to be a Then?"

Instead of answering directly, she said: "You haven't signed it."

"Oh, you want it signed?" He scrawled the name "K. G. Ruyland"; then, looking up and catching her quizzical gaze, added "Patroons' Club," hesitated, and appended still a third line "Until Friday."

She nodded her acknowledgments.

"Are you all right?" he asked, glancing at the patient Bobby who, by dint of gallant efforts, was waking up in his chair at intervals, only to lapse into uneasy slumbers again.

"Oh, yes! He's perfectly safe. Good night."

She did not give him her hand. He was glad of that. It would have been anticlimax. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT manner of girl his acquaintance of the road-house was, Kennion Ruyland did not consider more than casually. There was an assumption in his mind, arising from the general circumstances of their encounter. For the rest, he had found her both charming and amusing, and it was with impatience that he awaited a message from her, and annoyance that he failed to get it. "Until Friday" he had written under his signature. Here it was Friday afternoon and no word. Ah, well, what else was to be expected from that type! He laughed at himself a bit ruefully for having stayed over several trains already, and was in the act of packing when the phone rang. Then he laughed at himself again, realizing that he had actually jumped. The usual preliminaries followed his removal of the receiver.

"Mr. Ruyland? . . . Just a moment. . . . A lady, to speak with you. . . . Yes; there's Mr. Ruyland. Go ahead." Then a level voice, tonelessly unlike the buoyant irregularity of his memory, said accusingly:

"Why haven't you called me up before?"

"Who is it?"

"Mary. Didn't you get my message?"

"Mary!" he exclaimed. "When did you get back?"

"Last week. You sound more astonished than pleased. Whom did you hope it was?"

"Nobody. I didn't know any one particularly knew I was here."

"Did you hope?"—now the flatness went out of the

voice and the words took wing—"that it was the subject of your sketch?"

"You little fiend! And is your name Mary?"

"Far from it."

"Why haven't you phoned before?"

"Experiment. To see if you'd wait over."

"I didn't. Not for that."

"So I see."

"Oh, well, have it your own way." Evidently this was to be warfare. Better look to his weapons, he guessed, if he was to emerge with credit against a challenger of this apparent mettle. "What's next?"

"Cocktails at six."

"Listens reasonable. And then take you out to dinner?"

"My heart is torn to ribbons, but I have another engagement."

"Bad news. Where's your flat?"

"Flat? Oh, I live at—"

"Should I have said 'apartment'? I've been a foreigner so long. And I thought all New Yorkers lived in them now," he added hastily, trying to cover his tracks.

"I don't. I live in a hat box." She gave him an address just off Lexington Avenue.

"Perfect, geographically. But it lacks one detail."

"I see. Mrs. Gage is the open sesame name."

"Mrs. Ga— Oh, of course!" He wondered, without cynicism, whether there was a "Mr. Gage" and suspected that his slip had been interpreted when he heard the stifled laughter that preceded the query: "Why 'of course'?"

"Just my luck, I mean."

"Not so torpid," she approved. "Then I'll expect you."

"Five fifty-nine will find me on the curbstone encouraging the hands of my watch."

The house, upon such cursory inspection from the outside as might be achieved by one who walked past it three separate times, was what, in Paris, would be called the *bijou* type. Quite in the picture, thought Ruyland. Inside, however, when he was admitted upon the stroke of six, it showed a soberer taste than he had foreseen. Flowers were there in plenty, some good rugs, and a couple of well-chosen pictures.

"All right, Delia; I'm coming down," said *the* voice, and the owner came breezing in, both hands clasped behind her.

"Who is Mary?" she demanded.

"How did you know there was a Mary?"

"Every well-conducted young man has one somewhere, if it's only a sister. It's a safe bet. Shall I apologize for getting a rise out of you? No, I shan't."

"How do you know I'm a well-conducted young man?"

Her eyes drooped, but he was watchful enough to catch the flicker of mirth in them. "Now you're trying to excite my hopes. What would Mary say?"

"Lord knows! Mary's my cousin. Age, thirty-seven. Face, honest. Children, five."

"Good-by, Mary! Have you finished up any of the other sketches?"

"No. I'm waiting to study the subject further."

"How about that train to—wherever it is?"

"Habersham."

"Glory! Are you one of the Habersham Ruylands?"

"I'm certainly from that exact spot."

"I might have known. Any one as young as you and belonging to the Patroons. How does it feel to be that way?"

"Are you having a good time guying me?"

"Not so good! You're too suspicious. Inside I expect you're all swelled up with pride and riches and traditions and all that sorta thing. Being the oldest family in New England that's successively manufactured paper collars for rag dolls, generation after generation for a couple of hundred years, ought to give you a special atmosphere. I wonder why you dress it up the way you do. What time does your train go?"

"Seven."

"Wrong. You asked me to dinner."

"Right. You refused."

"Suppose I'd changed my mind."

"The New Haven Railroad hasn't changed its."

"Meaning that since the train goes at seven—"

"I go too. Exactly."

"Sternly immovable will power. I believe you're trying to make me love you."

"Such is my modest hope."

"He scoots to conquer. I will say that you're better than you looked at first sight. What's wrong with that armchair you're occupying?"

"I thought there might be room for two on that divan."

"When there is, I'll send you a radio. And here, at the opportune moment, comes Propriety's very self."

A small, dumpy, middle-aged woman entered. She was very plain, quite near-sighted, limped a little from premature rheumatism, and wore clothing primarily designed for comfort; but at the first sound of her voice and estimate of her manner, all preconceived notions vaguely entertained by young Mr. Ruyland as to the nature of the establishment he was in came tumbling about his ears with a crash. That his lower jaw didn't crash with them was owing only to the blessed fact that it was firmly fastened to the upper. Whether in Vienna, Paris, Naga-

saki, or the Aleutian Islands, there was no possibility of mistaking this little, quiet, unassertive lady for anything other than what she was. The visitor retracted his betraying jaw sufficiently to murmur an acknowledgment of the introduction, while ardently hoping, for his future comfort, that the girl had noticed nothing.

"You could tell that she was my mother anywhere, couldn't you?" she was saying. "But I'm the only bad mark in an otherwise perfect record."

"Fredericka always sobers up after a cocktail, Mr. Ruyland," said Mrs. Gage, taking the shaker from the maid. "But the plain air, that the rest of us breathe without harm, goes to her head."

"*Joie de vivre*, and all that sorta thing, if you know what I mean. I think, mommer-of-my-soul, that you came just in time to save me, as Mr. Ruyland was making passes as if he intended to hold my hand."

"I think I'll take one myself," said Mrs. Gage placidly. "It's been a rough day at the Club."

"Mother's the living rock upon which candidates for the Colony Club dash themselves until they split open and die of exposure. She won't let me in."

"Not until you grow up and become as respectable outwardly as you are inwardly, daughter. And don't show off too much before Mr. Ruyland. I suspect he sees through you already. I must go and dress."

No sooner had she left the room than Fredericka Gage's manner changed. Leaning forward, and with a challenging drawl, she demanded: "Why did you nearly faint when mother came in?"

(So she had noticed! Trust those deep-set, deceptively lazy eyes.) "I really don't know what you mean," he fenced.

"Is she the dark woman in a heavy veil that stole you, as an infant, from your unguarded cradle? Or what is

the thousand-dollar prize answer for the best title to the picture?"

"I tell you there's nothing."

"Then I've got to work it out for myself." She began to check the points off on her finger tips. "There was that about the flat. And your queer accent when you thought I was Mrs. Gage. And the something that you put into the sketch and that isn't me—I know I'm getting warm by your terrified expression. And your stroke of near-paralysis when you sized up mother. And when she joshed me about being more respectable than I pretended, you blinked. You did! And you're blinking now. *Was that it?*" she shot at him. "Mr. Ruyland, *what* kind of a girl did you take me for?"

"Not any kind—I mean, it doesn't matter. I didn't think about it."

"You did!" A great wave of laughter rose and overwhelmed her speech. "I've been grossly insulted," she gasped, "and—oh, oh, dear, oh—I've lost my chance of dignified resentment."

"If you'd been living abroad for five years," muttered the desperate caller, "and hadn't seen anything of the new type American girl—"

"Do we seem terrible? We're not, really. Grandma says that our crowd look and act like a lot of cheap chorus girls (but she means worse). Oh, I must take you to see the old dear and have you confirm her worst opinions of us. She'll be so tickled."

"Will she! Meantime I'll be making two yumps of it to south Patagonia."

"What time does your train leave? For home and safety, I mean; not south Patagonia. Seven, wasn't it?"

"Don't want it."

"But that's a delicate hint for you to beat it, as I have to dress and go out for dinner."

"With me?"

"Certainly not. Never had any such idea."

"In that case," he said, rising, "when again?"

She regarded him with compressed amusement. "Positively panting with eagerness. If I said in hollow tones: 'Never. Leave me at once,' would you collapse at my feet like a man with a bullet through his heart?"

"I shouldn't much like it."

"Actually you sound as if you wouldn't. Nor I. It isn't every day that one has the thrilling experience of being taken for a naughty-pretty. If I had been, as you supposed; if mother hadn't spilled the beans—I mean, saved the day—what was your next move?"

"How can I answer that?"

"You must know. Why did you come to see me?"

"Attraction, I suppose."

"*That* kind of attraction? I'm flattered."

"All attraction that counts for anything is more or less of that kind, isn't it?"

"Now you're being philosophical or metaphysical or high-browish of some kind."

"No. Just honest."

"I like that."

"Well enough to stand more of it?"

"However painful. Strike, if you must."

"Whatever you were—and I really didn't give it as much thought as you appear to think, one way or the other—I was too interested to go away without seeing you again."

"Not so bad. And after this rude shock you still preserve the noble ambition?"

"More than ever."

"Enough to stay over?"

"Enough to come back."

"Just as good. We—ll, say Monday."

"Fine! You'll dine with me then."

She put on a doubtful and demure air. "I'd like to, but I'm a little afraid that you might treat me too—"

"Don't be revengeful."

"—respectfully," she concluded.

"In that case I'll ask your mother—"

"Chaperonage? What do you think this is—the nineteenth century?"

"'In your place' I was about to say when you butted in."

"You're good, Geoffrey! Mother may be the august thanwhicher of social correctness and all that, but she really hasn't got so much on me, at that, in case you're worried. Of course, our *clichés* are different."

"Perhaps I'd understand her style better."

"But it wouldn't be nearly so good for you. No, you can't duck now. I'm going to take you out and save your soul. Come at seven."

"I'll change that sketch," he called back from the doorway, and got the swift reply:

"Your apology is accepted in the same spirit."

CHAPTER FOUR

"How long have you known Kennion Ruyland, Ricky?"

Fredericka Gage smiled at her mother, welcoming the pet name of her childhood, only occasionally employed, now, in their more confidential talks. "You ought to know. I'll bet it's down on your invisible records, that Friday three weeks ago when he first came here."

"Was that the beginning?"

"Practically. Didn't I tell you?"

"And you've been seeing him pretty often since?"

"As often as the demanding business of being a butterfly permits."

"What does the crowd think of him?"

"Oh, they don't know him. That is—well, I haven't tried to mix him in."

"No?"

"Oh, well!" she said a little fretfully and a little defensively. "It mightn't work. He is different, you know."

"But he's a gentleman."

"Naturally. Wouldn't have lasted long if he hadn't been," replied the daughter with superb insolence.

"Going to marry him?"

"How can I tell!"

"What about Bobby?" asked Mrs. Gage after a moment's hesitation.

The girl's expression changed. "Mr. Robert Enderby," said she with pretended austerity, "has never done me the honor to ask me."

"How can he, poor boy, on three thousand a year?"

"Then why doesn't he get busy and make more?"

"Of course he'll have a lot some day," mused Mrs. Gage.

"Then he'll be all the worse. I can see myself—when my imagination is working hard—marrying a waster on the chance of doing something with him, but I can't see myself staying married to a waster with so much money that there's no chance of his ever doing anything."

"I wouldn't be too sure that there's no chance of Bobby's coming out all right eventually."

"What are you trying to do, motherkin? Make it hard for me?"

"To make sure that you're not using this new interest as—well, as an anodyne."

"Oh, no! It isn't that. It's quite different."

"In that case—*are* you going to marry him?"

"Well, what do *you* think?"

Mrs. Gage's plump, plain, vivid face twinkled. "Any symptoms?"

The girl's reply, spoken after due deliberation, showed that there were few reservations between mother and daughter. "As far as that goes, if I'd been the kind he took me for first, I'd have left home and luxury for him and with him long ago."

"We—ell?" Rising intonation of significance.

"What an immoral woman you are, motherkin! That isn't the whole consideration, is it?"

"No. There is also the consideration of whether he wants to marry you."

"No; he doesn't, poor lamb. He doesn't really want to marry anybody."

"Rather an obstacle, isn't it?"

"Not a bit," she returned cheerily. "He thinks he wants to marry me because he wants me. I've made"

him. Rotten trick, wasn't it! Only it wasn't as deliberate as it sounds. So, of course he'll fall for the wedding bells as soon as I lift a finger." She laughed aloud. "We might be a couple of melodrama vamps, scheming to capture an innocent youth. It's funny, but there are times when I know he's been hanging over the edge, and pulls back, as if he were afraid."

"Probably he is."

"Of what? Not of me, I can tell you."

"Of the Ruylands, alive and dead. Of taking you into such an environment."

"Heavens! Are you trying to put a permanent curdle into my blood? What do you know about the environment?"

"I visited there before I was married."

"Twenty-five years ago. That isn't to-day."

"But it is, in Habersham. Ruylands never change."

"Don't tell me about them—now."

"You want to hear it from him?"

The girl nodded.

"You do care for him, don't you, Ricky!"

"A lot. In a way. There are times when I could just grab him and pull his head down to me and hug it, and if I did I wouldn't be sure that he wouldn't change into the Great God Pan, or something, and carry me away to an enchanted forest."

"I don't just see you as a forest-dweller, Ricky. You're too over-civilized."

"You see what I mean, though, don't you?" demanded the girl eagerly. "That feeling about a person who's just a faint bit unhuman—faun stuff—that you'd never quite be sure he wasn't listening to things you couldn't hear?"

"At any rate, he's made you romantic."

"Pooh! *You* made me romantic, by loving me so

much. All much-loved children are romantic if they're normal. Being romantic is nothing but wanting to be loved."

"I'm afraid it's wanting to love too. That's the third fairy's gift. Is he coming in this evening?"

"The third fairy? Or the half mortal? Yes; *he's* coming, afternoon and evening. We're motoring somewhere for dinner and back when we get ready. This is my day, I think, to pull the gentle and sensible and serious line. Motherkin, why are women such play-acting tricksters?"

"Tradition of the sex. How could we catch us a man if we weren't?"

"And you pretend not to be a modernist—when you are more up-to-date than all us young lot put together!"

"Because dates don't matter and women don't change in the things we're talking of. Nor men either."

"Suppose I don't act at all. Just be my natural self."

"Therein danger lies!"

"It's a world of pitfalls," laughed Fredericka. "Anyhow, Kennion is pretty well hep to me and my parlor tricks by now. And as he never lets me know it until afterward, when I find out he's been laughing at me all the time, it keeps me guessing. That's the kind of thing, mother mine, that helps ministers pay the rent with wedding fees."

Even though she might have resolved not to act a part, she dressed it with care and cunning simplicity. Kennion Ruyland's half-suppressed "Great Cæsar!" when she entered the room was sufficient tribute to set her dimpling.

"I see I shall have to do you all over again, and in pastels," he said. "And it'll take hours"

"Some rainy day, then. Not this kind. Where are we off to?"

"Anywhere. Go-until-we-stop idea."

"Suits me. I don't care if we never stop," she agreed gayly.

For half an hour they made interrupted progress northward, after which he turned into less frequented roads, where the driving did not claim all his attention.

"Now," said he, looking her over quizzically, "what rôle are you cast for to-day?"

"Do you think I'm always playing a rôle?" she answered, aggrieved.

"Pretty much. Aren't you? I like it."

"Which do you prefer?"

"All are clever. Most are delightful. Some are bewildering."

"The first was the worst, wasn't it?"

"Technically, one of the best of all."

"I'll admit I was showing off a little for your benefit that night in the road-house. But it wasn't all acting either. I was feeling pretty reckless that night. I'm always reckless when I'm unhappy."

"Unhappy! You?" He laughed.

"Tenderly sympathetic, aren't you!"

"But the thing sounds so absurd."

"All right, then. Unhappy's scratched. Say, discontented."

Dogwood and wild cherry made a bower for them at the bend of a small and confidential stream, whither he led her across fences and through a forbidding and thorn-set thicket.

"How glorious!" she breathed, her face sensitive in every line to the loveliness of the spot. "I don't even want a cigarette. So *there's* a testimonial to your choice of romantic real estate."

She dropped by the edge of the water; let herself for-

ward and down between small hands firmly planted in the brook's bed, drank eagerly, like a young, wild thing, and, with the lissome strength of a young animal, sprang in one motion back to her feet and stood looking down at him.

"Gymnasium stuff," he remarked. "You're hard, aren't you?"

"Yes. I'm in condition. If we had a referee, I'd wrestle you."

"You'd win," he conceded lazily. "Sit down and tell me all about it."

"In the first place," she began, "you're the queerest human being of my large and exciting acquaintance."

"Hold on! We're not talking about me."

"I'm the cheer leader of this section. Watch my signals. Now—I don't approve of you at all."

"All right. I don't specially approve of myself."

"You've got the excuse of being an artist, I suppose."

"Do you have to curl your nose up at the corners when you suppose? Besides, I'm not an artist."

"Not? What are you?"

"Alleged to be a chemist."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"What's the importance?"

"None. It just strikes me as funny that we must have talked several million words together, yet I don't know a darn thing about you."

"Except my inmost thoughts," he murmured.

"Probably I've been talking about myself all the while," she pursued. "And then, when you were gone, I'd start in and wonder what made you so secretive, and whether it was the secretiveness that made you so unusual and unlike other men. But I think it's partly your looks."

"What's the matter with 'em?" he sighed patiently.

"They suit me, so long as I don't have to enter 'em in any beauty contest. They're awfully easy to get along with because there isn't enough of 'em to make anybody worry over 'em."

"But there *is*. Everything about you is—well, it's—it's excessive. Your face is too long and too sharp. Your nose is too fine, and it has the weirdest habit of quivering like an animal's when you're specially interested. Your ears are pointed, your hair is anywhere at all, your eyes aren't quite straight, and your mouth—well, I have to grant you something on your mouth; it crinkles so nicely when you're amused and trying not to let on that you're amused. But you lope instead of walking, and your clothes are *terrible*. Why do you do it? I'm not even sure that you're sane, but you are interesting. I wonder why."

He lay back, hands clasped behind his head, gazing up at her, and murmured:

"O swallow, sister, O fair, swift swallow!
Why wilt thou fly after spring to the South?"

"Intended as a contribution to the subject?" she inquired. "If so, how?"

"It's what your voice reminds me of. Did from the first. You, yourself, too. I think your spirit has wings." He made illustrative, wavy motions in the air with his left hand. "Where will they take you, I wonder. I suppose," he added meditatively, "I'm falling in love with you."

"How precipitate!" she mocked. "Besides, it's out of place. This is the class in biography. Where have you been all these years when you ought to have been getting acquainted?"

"College. Vienna and way stations. War. Where have you?"

"Finishing school. Coming out. War work. Mine was a million miles from the front. You were in it?"

"About as much as you'd expect of a Ruyland."

Her eyes narrowed upon him. "Bitter, eh? What's wrong with the Ruylands?"

"Pull. Valuable lives, and all that kind of tosh. As I was over there, and on the ground, they pinned some shoulder straps on me and chucked me into a perfectly safe and comfortable job."

"I'd have resigned and gone into the ranks," she declared with heat.

"And disgraced the family? Not if you were a Ruyland. You don't know the Ruylands."

"Are you trying to make yourself out a coward?" she asked curiously.

"You asked for data. Draw your own conclusions."

"And this?" Lightly her fingers brushed a weal that ran lividly from the rather too long hair at the back of his neck, down below the line of the collar.

"Ambulance service, before the family caught me at it."

"Ah! That's better," she mused.

"Let's get away from me, shan't we?" he suggested anxiously. "What I'm interested in is you."

"We—ell," she drawled provocatively, "I should think we've known each other long enough for you to begin to exhibit a trace of human interest."

"From most girls that would sound like a dare."

"Am I so different from most girls?"

"For all your pretense at not being, I suspect that you are."

"So much so as to be inhuman?"

He did not answer in words, but bent slowly toward her. Her body swayed a little back from him, but there

was no denial in her posture. When he lifted his head, her fingers slid down his arm to rest on his hand.

"Why haven't you ever kissed me before, I wonder," she murmured.

"I was just plain afraid."

"Of committing yourself?" she taunted.

"That's a rotten thing to say!" he cried angrily. "And you know it."

"Roused lion," she commented. "I didn't think it could be done. What were you afraid of?"

"That you didn't want me to—until now."

"You were pretty nearly right—until now. No," she defended as he leaned to her again. "Wait." She mused for a few seconds. "There's a good deal of bluff about me, as you said. All this fast-young-set stuff. I play that game because it seems to be the only game there is to play except the highbrow, and that bores me. But I've never gone in much for the popular pastimes of petting and the allied sports. Even if you did take me for a professional coquette," she added with malice.

"Ouch!"

"Yes, that was below the belt. Forgotten! I don't mean to claim"—she put on a mincingly maidenish expression—"that I've kept my lips untouched for my first and only true love, like the princess in the fairy tale. There have been men, and episodes. I've even been engaged, or something very like it, a couple of times. It didn't take either time. What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I was just reveling in your voice. *How* do you do it?"

"Aren't you paying any attention to what the darn thing says?" The winged lift-and-fall of the words took on a plaintive tone.

"Every word. What was wrong with the engagements?"

"Oh, the first man was too much impressed with himself, and the second was too much impressed with me."

"Is that a disadvantage?"

"Of course. I could put it all over him. So I got bored."

"I'm afraid I'd show the same fatal weakness as the second man. How long do you think it would take you to get bored with me?"

"Wouldn't be safe to try. I might even go through with it and marry you. And then where would you be!"

"Would you marry me, Freddy?"

"Do you think I brought you out here to make you ask me?"

"No."

"Chivalrous youth! You know damwell I did."

"All right, then, you did. In that case, will you marry me?"

"Kennion, did you ever read the marriage service?"

"No. Did any one? Except a clergyman?"

"Would you read it if you were going to get married?"

"Don't see why I should."

"Is there any other kind of contract you'd sign on the dotted line without reading?"

"Certainly not. Never thought of it that way."

"I have. And I've read it."

"What's your critical opinion of the document?"

"I think it's all wrong. Too binding."

"But that's the idea of it, isn't it? Is it the 'obey' you object to? I'm with you there."

"That doesn't worry me so much. If I loved a man enough to live with him, I'd take a chance on going his way. It's the forever clause: 'till death do us part.'"

"You think it wouldn't last?"

"How can I tell? I think, now, I'd like to marry you."

But I've thought that about at least one other man. Then I got over thinking it."

"You're a strange child. Would you leave me to marry Elberta?"

Miss Gage sat up quite abruptly, and then looked accusingly at the grass as if something had unexpectedly pricked her. "Who's Elberta?"

"My cousin."

"But you can't marry your cousin."

"Why not? We Ruylands usually do."

"How abominable! I won't let you. Are you in love with her?"

"No. I'm in love with you."

"I'm not so sure of that! Is she crazy about you?"

"Elberta? She couldn't be crazy about any man. She's a nun at heart."

"I don't trust these nunlike girls. Is she pretty?"

"Meaning 'Is she prettier than I am?'" (Don't slaughter that violet, Freddy; it never done nothin' to you.) From the artistic point of view, I must admit that she is. But that lets her out. Nothing else. No magnetism."

"I don't like her," declared Fredericka. "*She'd* be just mean enough to marry you forever and till-death-do-us-part."

"It's another family habit. We've never had a divorce in the clan except once. It was worse than an earthquake. Aunt Augusta read 'em out of the clan with bell, book, and candle; hell, hook, and scandal."

"Who's Aunt Augusta and what's she got to do with it?"

"Everything, being the head of the clan. Runs the whole show. Presiding goddess of all Habersham and much of the surrounding country. And my revered and more or less beloved great-aunt."

"She's the one that wants you to marry Elberta—loathsome name!"

"Intuition, thy name is Freddy."

"And would Elberta really do it?"

"Oh, we all do as Aunt Augusta bids us, more or less. Besides, if Bert doesn't marry me, the next choice is Josephus, and Josephus is a dull clod, if he is my cousin. Most of us are pretty dull."

"You're not."

"Because I've been away from the bunch so long. But I suppose I'll go back and be absorbed into the type again," said he with a strange touch of moodiness. "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes, Ruyland to Ruyland at the last: that's what they say in Habersham."

"Not you, Kennion. You're different," she returned, happily confident.

"None of us is different inside. Even those who come into the family seem to take on its characteristics."

"*Do* they!" She kicked a vicious little heel into the turf. "You'd expect me to be absorbed into that atmosphere and become a real Ruyland?"

"What's the use of expecting? You'll never be anything but yourself. For which Heaven be praised!"

She smiled to him, but her eyes were doubtful. "What if your great-aunt doesn't like me?"

"Oh, she won't. Because you're not a Ruyland. That's a foregone conclusion. But she'll get over it in time. She's a fierce old bird, the august Augusta, but she has her p'int. Ah, an idea! I'll beg, borrow, or hire a car in New York, mine being laid up for repairs, jog in for you early Monday, and whirl you down there where you can see the lair of the Ruylands for yourself, and meet any of 'em you may pick, and we can get back not too late that evening. What do you say?"

"All right," said the girl hesitantly. "It's your risk. No; it's both our risks. It may spoil everything. And I don't want it spoiled," she whispered, her face softening.

"The desperate part of it is," he said an hour later as they walked reluctantly back to the car, her fingers curling into his, "that I'm too much in love with you to get over it if you do decide that the Ruylands are too much of a good thing."

"I don't suppose I'm going to," she answered.

Dinner, in a quiet corner of a comfortable old inn, was given over to a long, close, atmosphere-clearing talk, a talk that was more friendly than anything else on the surface, whatever loverly subcurrents may have underrun it. When he bade her good night, not far short of the stroke of midnight, in the dim and flower-fragrant box that the Gages called a hallway, she was tenderness itself for a moment in his arms before she drew back.

"Just the same," she said, "I'm a vulgar little wench."

"You! How do you make that out?"

"Oh, I'm really snobbishly impressed by your money and your position and your—your Ruylandishness."

"Don't see why. You've got enough of your own."

"Yes. But yours is different. It's so old and distinctive and interwoven. A world of your own to which every one else is an outsider. I can't think of any wilder risk than our marriage would be."

"Wrong again! It'll be all your way. I've got the fatal weakness of never being able to fight any one I care for."

"Can't you?" She searched him with a look. "I can. But it tears the heart out of me. When I spoke of risk I was thinking of you, though, not of myself. I can always squirm out if I find that I've married the whole damfamly and they're too much for endurance."

"What a cold-blooded little cat you are!"

"Cold-blooded? I? And *you* say that—idiot!" She laughed aloud and her laughter was a challenge.

"Then why, if you feel that way, do you doubt—"

"Myself? Because I'm one of those unlucky girls who are built in two parts—mind and body. There's a sort of partition between the two. I can think quite detached from my—well, my emotions. Life would be much simpler if I didn't. In that case I'd probably reach out and grab you, eternal vows and all. But—well, there you are."

"I don't care," he declared unsteadily. "I want you."

"Do you, dear?" The music of her voice softened again. "Well, I expect you're going to have me. Oh, well, it's all a big gamble, and who's afraid! Good night."

She brushed his lips with hers, and ran up the stairs, but turned at the top to say elfishly: "I'm going to make you cut your hair, you know."

"Another Ruyland carelessness. All right—Delilah."

A shadow fell upon the bright face above him. "Ah, no! Not that."

He stood, listening to her footsteps which moved slowly and heavily, wholly unlike her usual springy step, as if she carried the weight of a suddenly burdened mind.

"Now what did I say that for?" he thought, disgustedly. "And what on earth made her take it that way?"

He walked dispiritedly out to his car. That projected Monday's trip was the occasion of the accident.

CHAPTER FIVE

AUGUSTA RUYLAND lived on the Ruyland Rock. The Rock rose, abrupt and impregnable, out of the very center of Habersham. Generations of the clan had inhabited it since the first American Ruyland set his house there to emphasize his dominance over the environment; each generation had added to it, wing by wing, extending it sidewise or lengthwise, or anglewise, adding here a conservatory, there a gallery, elsewhere a garage, until the architectural accumulation, sprawling over most of the rugged outcrop, came to look like a medieval castle designed in a spirit of ribald parody. Of all those who had held the stronghold against the encroachments of trade, of change, of innovation, the latest chatelaine was the only one who had thought to carry out its grim logic by fortifying it. On two sides of the rough-shaped triangle she had built a wall. To the north a long-buried stream was uncovered, banked, and set to guard the longest base of The Rock. A bridge, built of rounded rocks stuck in mortar and looking as brittle and sticky as the peanut candy whence the style obviously derived its inspiration, afforded a main entrance between squared stone towers which bore a grilled iron drop-gate so superb that artists made pilgrimage to see it and were graciously received by the owner if they looked sufficiently artistic and knew their place. She commissioned a thousand-dollar painting from one because he told her in emotional accents that her peanut-brittle bridge was absolutely unique. It was. But the painter's emotion was not precisely of the sort that Mrs. Ruyland naïvely supposed it to be.

All day long and half the night a great human tide eddied around and past The Rock. Perhaps one-tenth of the particles of that tide were directly identified with the stalwart fortunes typified by it, lived in its shelter, and with their toil bulwarked its stability. The other nine-tenths of those who dwelt in Habersham were more indirectly but not less fundamentally dependent upon it. Half a mile away in the leafy depths of the gorge, the Ruyland Paper Company's Mills smoldered and clattered; great, gluttonous, vegetarian spiders that reached out and gathered to themselves and devoured the ancient growth of mountain and swamp hundreds of miles distant, wiping out a forest in a day to grind it to pulp and spin it into the endless web of newsprint for the millions, wall paper for the thousands, dainty stationery for the luxurious few. That the mills should clang, labor, and weave was important to the business of the country; that ten thousand comfortable working folk, with those dependent upon them, should draw a sufficient wage and enjoy a kindly, fostering paternalism, was a satisfaction to the souls of the right-thinking; that Habersham should have grown from ten to twenty to fifty and now to beyond the hundred thousand because of what the Ruyland genius and the Ruyland fidelity to the place had done and would continue to do, presumably until the end of calendared time, was in its way a theme for glorious oratory. But the vital thing was that every carload of Ruyland paper shipped out brought in its incremental return which, layer by patient layer, incrustated and solidified and assured the eternal structure of the Ruyland Rock with all that it stood for. The myriad coral workers of a mighty and beneficent industry were building, building, building endlessly around the proud, frail, determined person of a vivid old woman, forming a stronghold beyond the threat of any besieging force.

She was seventy years old. And childless.

She did not regret her age. She did regret, but without repining, the lack of direct descendants. She repined at nothing, being too vigorous mentally and spiritually for such weak wastefulness of energy. Nor did she attribute this lack in her life to the dispensations of an all-wise Providence. In fact, while she had a well-founded respect for God as an individual, she deemed His providence far from all-wise, and was convinced that she could better many of its workings. Whenever she had interfered with its operations, it was always with effects which she herself approved. For example, marriages, which might be made in heaven for lesser folk, were concocted on The Rock for the Ruylands. For generations Ruylands had married Ruylands and produced Ruylands. Preferably second cousins, but sometimes first. Why this did not result in a breed of super-Ruylands was something that the head of the clan could not or would not understand. She shut her eyes resolutely to the fact that the strain was becoming attenuated; what she could not blink was the flat fact that of late years there had been a development of one-child families in the clan, instead of the glorious old wholesale days of eight, nine, or even twelve offspring to one union, or perhaps of two or three successive ones if the earlier wives died, as they sometimes did under the test. Her own marriage was the only one-child failure of her generation, but that was generally conceded to be the fault of her husband, Hasleton Ruyland, an amiable but mild person who had not imparted sufficient vitality to his first and only son to enable him to survive his first year. Disheartened by this failure and seeing no prospects of redeeming himself, the futile husband went west on a tour and was chased over a cliff by a grizzly bear which he was supposed to be shooting. It was regarded as a most in-

decorous death. Well-conducted Ruylands died at home and were buried by Mudge, the Habersham undertaker.

Tradition being stronger in her mind than experience, Augusta Ruyland had decided that the best interests of the family demanded a marriage between her grand-nephew, Kennion, himself the child of first cousins once removed, and Elberta, daughter of John, whose mother had been a distant connection. And now Kennion was causing her some concern by what might prove an attachment to this painted girl of the motor accident. The keen-eyed Augusta did not at all like the way the young man had looked at his companion. Wild oats were not a Ruyland crop, or, if they were, the sowing was at least discreet. There had been but two instances approaching the unpleasant in the whole long record, one of them Americus, the grandfather of Elberta, who had bequeathed to her the long, deep-fringed violet eyes of whose capabilities she was so negligent. Still, no other Ruyland had ever been allowed to go abroad when as young as Kennion. If he had acquired false and cheap standards over there, they must be eradicated. But the first thing to do was to find out more about the girl. It was now three weeks since the child had been run over, and Mrs. Ruyland knew that the painted girl had been in town with Kennion at least twice since. So she had set inquiries afoot. That was Dawley Cole's job. It was about time that he reported on it.

Mrs. Ruyland retired to what was known in family circles as the Cavern, or, in the mouths of the lighter-minded, the Conspiratory. No member of the tribe had ever been inside it. Nor had any other person except the trusted and septuagenarian maid who dusted it (with Augusta looking on), and Dawley Cole. It was a large, remote, one-windowed room in a far corner of the second story, wherein—it was believed—the chieftainess ma-

tured her plans for the clan's greater glory, well-being, and sometimes discomfort. Here, though the others knew it not, she kept her secret treasures. For Augusta Ruyland was possessed by the collector's passion. She collected facts. Those alphabetically arranged archives, steel-boxed and patent-locked, contained enough social dynamite to bring down the structure of several cities in irretrievable ruin. People to whom Augusta Ruyland was but a vague name, or not even that, would have ceased sleeping of nights could they have gone through some of those documents setting forth facts and incidents of which they supposed themselves to be the sole confidants. Anything which touched the Ruyland Mills, the Ruyland interests, or the Ruyland family, however remotely, was game for this remarkable bag, which was continually added to and expanded according to the directions of the collector, since, once she hit upon a trail, even though it led far afield from Ruylandiana, she followed it interminably for the sheer love of the chase. To a yellow journal that collection would have been almost beyond price. For its gathering, Dawley Cole was her expert and field operator.

Augusta Ruyland was perhaps the only individual in the United States to keep a private reporter. Such, precisely, was Dawley Cole. He would have been shocked to be called that, repelled at being termed a detective, and honestly horrified at the suggestion that he practiced the arts of the spy. Yet he was a mixture of all these, partly *con amore*, partly because he had no adequate means of support other than serving his rich and beneficent relative. He was a smallish, fattish, pinkish man of fifty-odd, with the pleasantest of tentative smiles and a cultivated cordial voice. His chief fitness for his peculiar rôle lay in a positive genius for self-effacement: he could find out anything that was ascertainable and

much that was supposed not to be, by a method of approach and lying in wait so unobtrusive that it suggested an animal's instinct for protective coloration. Seeing Mr. Cole at work, one would never dream that he was after anything.

Nature had obviously molded him for the perfect blackmailer, but he lacked initiative and was too much the gentleman.

His cousinly employer maintained for him membership in two Boston and three New York clubs covering a wide social range. She used him as the hunter uses a cheetah, starting operations from a concealed spot, and leaving the rest to the creature's natural capacities. Seldom did he fail of his quarry.

On this June morning, having reported at his usual hour of 10 A. M., his pleasant little face was lively with satisfaction.

"Everything, Cousin Augusta," he announced, anticipating her question. "Positively everything. From direct sources."

"Her own family?"

"Precisely. One happens to have known that branch."

"Hmph! And the connection is respectable?"

"More than that. Unimpeachable, I assure you. Mrs. Gage is—"

"I don't care about Mrs. Gage. It's the girl I want facts on."

"Product of her age. Gay, intelligent, heedless, full of life, charming—"

"You needn't tell me about the charm. I could see it sticking out from under the paint." Augusta Ruyland was clever enough not to belittle an opponent, even to herself.

"Oh, paint! This younger generation. Not so different, one fancies, from our own."

"*Our* own. Hark to the man. Don't try to flatter my age, Dawley Cole. I'm past that."

"What hope remains if a woman is past flattery!"

"None of your famous clevernesses, either. Is Kennion really entangled?"

"Oh, as for entangled, one hardly uses that term—"

"One has used it. And one would be glad of an answer."

"The Gages are scarcely of the adventuress type."

"Whnmpfh!" As nearly as a great lady unintermit-
tently conscious of her great ladyship can grunt, Augusta
Ruyland grunted. "Are they together much?"

"Quite a little."

"The boy's a fool. Was that her first visit here, last
month, when she almost murdered the little Selover
child?"

"Oh, come, Cousin Augusta—"

"I said murder, and I mean murder. What else is it
when a little fool deliberately turns her face away from
the road and puts on speed, just to insult her betters?"

"Manslaughter possibly. But the child isn't going to
die."

"I know she isn't. Lucky for the Gage girl."

"There will probably be a suit for damages."

"I know there will. Not so lucky for the Gage girl."
Hard satisfaction was indicated in the smile.

"I fear you may be called upon to testify."

"Fear? I won't be reluctant to tell them the truth."

Within the prudent recesses of his soul, Mr. Cole re-
flected that truth, as employed by his patroness, was a
malleable product readily taking on the form of her de-
sires. He guessed that she would be an important if not
a vital witness for the plaintiff—or, at least, against the
defendant.

"There may also be a criminal action," she observed.

"You haven't seen Ruyland Carr!" Ruyland Carr was the prosecuting attorney; the implication was possibly provocative and therefore dangerous, but Dawley Cole was startled, for the moment, beyond caution.

"Whether I have or have not is neither here nor there."

"Of course not! Of *course* not, Cousin Augusta. But Kennion says that he seized the wheel."

"Kennion lies."

"He would swear to it on the stand. Any gentleman would."

"Spare me your stale opinions upon the duty of a gentleman to perjure himself."

"If she did go to jail through your testimony, it would only make a martyr of her, and Kennion would marry her at the prison door."

Her quick judgment seized and conceded the point. "For the first time you are talking sense. Yes; there mustn't be any criminal prosecution. As for the damage suit, I shan't lift a finger. She needs a lesson."

("She'll get it if she marries into this family," thought Mr. Cole.) Aloud he said: "The hurt child's case is interesting. It appears that she isn't nearly so much of a child as she looks. Stunted of growth in some queer way."

"They told me nothing of that at the hospital."

"Nothing was determined. They want your permission to operate. Thyroid, or some obscure gland affair, I believe."

"They can come and talk to me about it." Mrs. Ruyland accepted, as her henchman had assumed, her right and responsibility, as in the case of a vassal, to decide the momentous question. There might be a family in the background: that was unimportant. They could be handled, since they lived in Habersham.

"They say she will come with a rush; cover three or

four years' development in a few months if the operation is successful, and they're all keen to have her under observation and watch the mental awakening."

"Perhaps I'll drop in at the Memorial and talk with her myself."

At ten forty-five precisely she left the house. This was her invariable habit; the only one which she so far recognized as to permit it invariability. She was much too imperious and self-sufficing to allow any such mechanism as a clock to assume control over her conduct in any general sense. But, for economy of time (of which she had less, presumptively, left than she had use for) it was convenient to begin her day on schedule.

Three interested young physicians dropped their immediate concerns upon her arrival at the hospital, to attend upon her. Having absorbed what they had to tell her, she went on to see Dr. Stanley, the outside expert whom Kennion had summoned to the case. He did not leave a patient, to accommodate her whim, but kept her waiting twelve impatient minutes while he examined a laundress with an earache. That was why Augusta Ruyland would not have him for her attending physician. It was also why she as nearly respected him as she could respect anybody not herself.

"You ought to get Margrave up from Boston," he said. "A very happy accident for the girl if everything turns out as well as it should."

"Keep it to yourself if it is," returned the old lady.

"Why so?"

"There's no reason why it should be brought out in the damage suit."

"I should think you'd want it brought out. Whose side are you on, anyway?" he inquired, puzzled. It did not sensibly enlighten him to have her reply:

"The side of justice."

"So am I if I'm called as a witness."

"Then you won't be called if I can help it. What about the operation? Is it dangerous?"

"No. But her family ought to be consulted."

"Go on with the job. Get any one you wish. I'll take care of the rest of it."

"But there are legal requirements—"

"Haven't I told you I'd take the responsibility? What ails the man! Leave the family to me."

"The name is Selover. Live in Silverbeech Lane, down—"

"I know all about that." Dawley Cole's neat little *dossier* on the Selovers was on file in the Conspiratory. "I'm going there now."

So steep is Mill Creek Gully opposite Silverbeech Lane that Carter advised against attempting the descent, and suggested that he accompany his mistress afoot. She preferred to go alone. Small, friendly children, some of whom recognized her as a grand lady useful to know around Christmas time, greeted her like a committee and escorted her to the gate of the Selover place where she dismissed them with some nickels. Through fruit trees she saw a small, bent man hoeing a plot.

"Are you Selover?" she asked, leaning on the fence.

"I'm Daniel Selover, ma'am. What can I do for you?"

"I am Mrs. Ruyland. You're the little injured girl's father?"

"Her grandfather."

"You've brought her up?"

"For the last seven years."

"And you're fond of her?"

"Yes." The monosyllable was completely convincing.

"Why haven't you had something done about her stunted growth?"

"It wasn't till a couple of years ago that I noticed

it. Kept fooling myself for a while. You do, you know, when you're fond of 'em. Now I've got almost enough money saved up to send her away."

"It isn't necessary to send her away." His face brightened, but at once settled into determination as he said: "I want the best man there is if they're going to operate."

"You can get him from Boston."

"For how much?"

"Much less than you ought to recover in damages for the injury to your granddaughter. I'll take care of that."

"Lawsuits are risky. Suppose we lose."

"My risk. I'll take care of that too. I'll get you the best lawyer in Habersham."

He looked at her with open suspicion. "Why should you mix up in it? It was a Ruyland car that hit her, they tell me."

"No. It was a livery car."

"But there was a Ruyland in it."

"There was. My grandnephew, Mr. Kennion Ruyland."

"And his girl."

The old lady flushed. "She isn't his girl, as you put it."

"Anyway, she was driving the car."

"And she must take the responsibility."

"So! It's there the wind blows! Has she got money?"

"Her family has—some."

"You say it was her fault?"

"Certainly. I saw the whole thing. The little fool wasn't looking where she went."

"My Dorrie says *she* wasn't looking either. She was chasing a cat."

"What should she know about it, after the shock of being run over? It was the girl's fault wholly."

"Hm! She seems a nice young lady and wants to do the right thing."

"Where did you see her?"

"A couple of times at the hospital when she fetched over toys and candy to Dorrie."

"Naturally she'd do all she could to win your confidence and soft-soap you into being easy on her."

"Think she's that kind?"

"Certainly she is. A schemer. But that's neither here nor there," she declared briskly. "The question is, will you go through with this thing and get the money for her which she deserves and needs, to give her the best surgical help possible, and educate her afterward?" (She was quick to mark the lighting up of the man's shrewd face.) "I'm so sure of your success that if you'll go on with the suit, I'll advance the money to pay for the Boston surgeon, and take my chances."

"That's good of you. I can't turn that down."

"Here is my lawyer's name and address. Go to see him to-morrow. Oh! And I'd keep away from that girl. It might hurt our chances if you said anything to her the other side could use."

"There was some talk of her coming to see me to-day."

"To-day? Is she in town?"

"Up at the hospital, I understand."

"With Mr. Kennion?"

"Like as not," was the dry response.

Augusta Ruyland rose. "It will be just as well if you don't speak of my visit to any one. I'll tell my lawyers that you will call."

Storm and stress marked her visit to the largest and oldest law offices in Habersham. These were the inevitable concomitants to any attempt at dissuading Augusta Ruyland from a course of action, however ill-advised, upon which she was set. At the conclusion

of thirty-five minutes of solo, quartet, and choral efforts participated in by every one in the office except the telephone girl and the gate boy, she said immovably: "And please have it tried as soon as possible." And stumped out.

"Ruyland Memorial, Carter," was her next direction. On the way she had the dubious pleasure of seeing the car occupied by Kennion and the girl held up in a jam created by the traffic squad's diverting everything else for the convenience of her equipage. Kennion was at the wheel. They did not see her. She doubted, with a quiver of prophetic misgiving and wrath, whether they saw anything except each other.

Little Dorothy Selover was reported at the hospital desk as being practically recovered. Mrs. Ruyland announced her intention of going up.

"How do you do, my dear?" she said majestically, sitting down by the bedside.

"I'm very well, ma'am, thank you," said the patient in a polite and childish pipe.

"Have you got everything you want?"

The reply was prompt and decisive. "No, ma'am."

"What do you want?"

"I want my mousie."

"Your mouse is dead."

"I want another mousie."

Augusta Ruyland detested mice. "Mice are horrid little things. I'll get you a pretty, fluffy cat."

The child shuddered all over. "I hate cats. Cats are cruel. It was a cat that killed my mousie."

"But what would you do with a mouse here in the hospital?"

"Love it," said the child promptly. "The pretty lady in the car promised to bring me one. But they said I couldn't have a mousie in the hospital."

"You shall have one. As soon as it can be tamed." Mrs. Ruyland made a note on the tablet dangling from the old-fashioned chatelaine at her waist, to have the bird-house keeper at Ruyland Park catch and educate at once a mouse suitable for hospital use.

"Thank you, ma'am." The child lifted her arms expectantly, and Mrs. Ruyland realized with misgivings that she was expected to receive a kiss. She was not a kissing woman; not even in the family. Apart from personal reluctance toward show of affection, she deemed it an unsanitary habit and prided herself upon being in the forefront of medical progress by taking that stand. She shook the little girl firmly by the hand and took her departure.

Carter, the habituated, needed no orders for his next port of call. With her own still competent senses of touch, sight, smell, and bargain, his mistress would now personally select the food for next day's meals; her servitor following her course with the deep, round basket which was to accommodate the purchases. Other knowing housewives, Ruylands, less gloriously named connections, and all that small outside element of Habersham which was permitted to move in the same sphere, would be hovering about the counters of the chosen store, each with her basket which, being filled, would then be garnished by a nosegay of the freshest and gayest flowers, the appreciation gift of the merchant who, to be sure, could well afford the little compliment out of his profits. Such was the quaint, age-hallowed tradition of basketing in Habersham. Though it was as rigidly businesslike as, for instance, going to church, yet there was always opportunity for a little exchange of views and news. At times Augusta Ruyland had there come upon some clew eventually developed into a valuable entry for those close-walled archives of hers.

This morning her intuitions scented the displeasing. By the hush when she was sighted, instantly converted into casual chatter as she neared a clannish group, she guessed that they were discussing Kennion and the strange girl. Every one knew, then, that the girl had been to town with him several times. Well—why not? Natural enough for her to wish to keep track of the child injured through her culpable negligence; that might be just ordinary kindness or it might be self-protection against a charge of the opposite. Whichever it was mattered little to Augusta Ruyland, but she wished she might have heard what interpretation the gossips were putting upon it. Nobody would tell her, since it was known that Kennion was her favorite, and assumed that his choice of companionship would meet with her disapproval.

Elberta Ruyland, granddaughter of the libertine Americus, came along the aisle, her lovely eyes downcast, her shoulders sagging, her gait listless. Viciously her aunt thought how she would like to poke her in the ribs; why couldn't the child act as if she had some interest in life? When the old lady spoke, her words had much the effect of the desired but impracticable poke:

"Do stand up, Elberta! You slump along like a half-dead thing."

Elberta muttered something in the nature of a perfunctory greeting.

The other consulted her tablet. "You've a birthday next week. Twenty-one?"

"Twenty-two." Her voice was as listless as her face.

"I've decided to give a dance for you in the conservatory wing."

"Thank you, Aunt Augusta."

"'Thank you, Aunt Augusta,'" echoed the other sardonically. "One might think I'd told you you were going to be beheaded."

Elberta inwardly thought that it wouldn't be so much better—a party composed exclusively of Ruylands and their near relatives. She was soul-sick of Ruylands. Being meek, she put the horrid disloyalty out of her head as soon as she realized her sin. "It will be lovely, Aunt Augusta," she said wearily.

"Come to luncheon at The Rock, then, and we'll talk it over."

Elberta had a golf luncheon on at the Country Club, but that could be changed. In fact, it had to be changed; Mrs. Ruyland's invitations were royal commands.

The great lady looked at her watch. Getting on for noon and much yet to be done. Half a dozen more errands completed her morning, and twelve-thirty saw the barouche draw up before the grilled gate. Having helped her out, the faithful Carter pressed a button set in one of the gate posts.

Instantly a huge serpent uncoiled from an obscure lair at the stair-top and sped, undulating formidably, down upon the staunch old lady below. Beneath her undismayed regard it thinned out as it advanced until it stopped at her very feet and lay, quietly submissive, transformed by the power of the human eye into a carpet for her feet. Up this she trod to the high door. The serpent would remain there all day and in the evening until she retired, a signal to the world that the chatelaine was within and available to friends and retainers; then it would again coil upon itself and retract to its den, of its own magic. It was the most picturesque of her vanities; the surest proof of her unassailability in Habersham was that no one had ever been known to laugh at it.

Straight to her office she went—not the Conspiratory, but a large, comfortable, tasteless room of nondescript character where she was awaited by her secretary, an

elderly collegiate person who existed in a state of perpetual and quiet awe. Not to have been there would have been worth her secretaryship. "Please locate Mr. Kennion," was the order she received.

Trained to the maximum of service through the minimum of interrogation, Miss Owen looked at her watch. She then placed her finger on the R of an alphabetical leaf directory.

"He will be lunching." Miss Owen looked up. "With a young—person."

Miss Owen's slim finger slipped over to the H's. "Arbuckle 333," she pronounced with such distinct softness that Central neglected the first of the unofficial rules and failed to ask for a repeat. A few questions and she turned to her employer. "They are there. Any message, Mrs. Ruyland?"

"Tell my nephew that I should like to see him and his companion here at three o'clock."

At the Habersham Country Club, Kennion Ruyland, returning from the phone to his table in a quiet corner, said to his vis-à-vis, with a mixture of doubtfulness and amusement: "How would you like to go and see the Grandante?"

"The Grandante?" she repeated. "Do you keep a Spaniard? Oh, I get it," she added, laughing. "It isn't bad. Who gave her that name?"

"Fritz Gillis. He's one of the town wits."

"Have I met him?"

"No; and you're not likely to unless you follow the family habit and shop at Gumbelius's. He's the general utility man there."

"What an atrocity of a name!"

"Isn't it! It's an atrocity of a store too. We're back of it, as we're back of most things here." And he went

on to expatiate at length when she broke in: "Jinky, do you want me to go and see your highly respectable relative or don't you?"

"Of course I do, Freddy."

"But you're afraid."

He flushed, but laughed. "She's rather an old war horse, you know. Rather an old dear too, in her way."

"I'm not afraid."

"You're not afraid of anything."

"Oh, yes, I am." The spell of her voice wreathed around him. "I'm afraid of you. No; I'm afraid of myself when I'm with you. Oh, I don't know what I mean, quite, or how to say it. But I don't think I'll see her to-day. I'd rather pick my time."

He sighed. "Yes, you've got to go up against her sooner or later."

Her eyes turned mutinous. "Oh, I don't know! I haven't married Clan Ruyland of Ruylandville, Ruyland County, State of Ruylandia, yet. I wonder, Jinky, if it came to the splitting point between her and me, which you'd pick."

"Don't be dim, Freddy. You know I'd chuck anything for you."

"Of course! If it was a straight choice, 'Choose this woman or this and forever after' and so on. But life isn't simple like melodrama. It's much less easy to figure out."

"This is simple as 'two and two make four.'"

"You think so now; but afterward— You see, Jinky, she's authority and tradition, and custom of the place, and pride, and family, and I—I'm only—"

"You're love itself," he broke in, leaning to her.

A flash shot through her face and was released from her eyes. "When you say things and look at me like

that you make common sense seem cheap. Yet—do you realize what we are to each other, Jinky?”

“Sure! Happily but secretly engaged pair.”

“We’re not. Not more than half. But I’m serious about this. We’re just a trick that nature is playing on us.”

“When you get going on that tack I’m completely out of it.”

“Because you’re so much closer to nature than I am that you can’t see her tricks, you—you slant-eared faun! If that curtain were drawn, I think”—she bared her little teeth at him—“I think I’d kiss you now, once and for all, and run away forever. That’d be wisest.”

“Pure lunacy,” he asserted. “With a dash of cowardice. I wouldn’t want to take you to see the Grandante to-day; you’re too much up in the air. She’d eat you alive. Excuse me while I go phone her that we can’t come.”

Mrs. Ruyland was not pleased when her secretary transmitted the message. But, when she wished to get her grandnephew on the phone to press the point, she was informed that he had left. He had not, as a matter of fact, but that simple strategy seemed the easiest way.

Elberta’s luncheon at The Rock was a far from pleasant occasion.

CHAPTER SIX

HIGH gossip of Habersham went unfed for a fortnight. Nothing further was seen of the brilliant-looking girl—too brilliant beside the prevalent dowdy type of Ruyland femininity—whom Kennion had so conspicuously conducted about the city. The ancient dame of The Rock, however, was not placated of her anxieties. That they had been seeing each other in New York, whither Kennion had taken several trips, she felt convinced even without Dawley Cole's adduced evidence. How far had the affair gone? And in what direction? Only too evidently this girl was bent on entrapping Kennion, and he seemed quite ready to be entrapped. How to save him?

If only Elberta would play up. But Elberta, biddable though she was, had evinced no thrills at the prospect of wedding her highly eligible cousin. Something which resembled a timidly sulky resentment against the idea of being married at all was the extent of her contribution to the cause. Very well! It should be Josephus for her if it was not Kennion. So much Augusta Ruyland indicated with an up-snap of the small chin. They would be well mated. A lifeless creature, Elberta, thought her aunt disgustedly.

(Up to a certain point her aunt was right; because her aunt could see only the present condition and not the potentialities of character. Elberta, of the heavy, violet eyes, had dwelt too long between contracted horizons. A physiologist would have guessed her to be the product of overbreeding. A psychologist might have

offered a juster and more tragic estimate. Not that Elberta had ever given it much thought. She was resigned. She had never really believed in the fairy, Happiness, anyway.)

Augusta Ruyland's reflections upon family inadequacy were interrupted by a phone call from Dawley Cole. Cautiously Mr. Cole informed his patroness that Kennion had arrived in town in his own car and not alone. Where had they gone, she inquired; to the hospital? In that direction certainly when Mr. Cole, on his way to the Boston train, had espied them. Mrs. Ruyland was articulately satisfied that they wouldn't get very far there.

So, indeed, it proved to the puzzled Fredericka. Her request to see Dorothea Selover was met with an evasive answer from the office nurse, who hastily referred the matter to the superintendent. That good lady was polite but positive. It was not desirable that the patient should see Miss Gage; it was likely to excite her too much. Kennion's face darkened. "Would it excite her too much to see me?"

The superintendent made the mistake of hesitating.

"I'll go up," said Kennion, and went before the official could make up her torpid mind what should be done. She compromised by telephoning hastily to The Rock.

Kennion found the child, still bandaged, sitting up against her pillow playing with her mouse. Her face struck him as strangely changed; strangely less childlike: there was a look of wonder and far-away surmise upon it.

"So you've got another mousie," said he, sitting down beside her.

"Yes." The voice had become softer and more assured. "Mrs. Ruyland gave it to me."

"And have you forgiven me, little friend?"

"Forgiven you?" She smiled up, questioning him with big, gray eyes in which there was a subtle melancholy.

"Don't you remember? You said you were going to hate me always because I wanted to put your mousie out of its pain."

"Oh, no!" She shook her head. "I couldn't hate you. I love you. You've been so good to me. Everybody's been so good to me. Why haven't you been to see me for so long?"

"I've been away most of the time."

"Has the pretty young lady been away too?"

"Yes. Would you like to see her?"

The eyes grew wistful. "Oh, yes! So much! But I mustn't."

"Why mustn't you?"

"They said I mustn't any more." She closed her delicate lips determinedly.

"And they told you not to tell?" He smiled. "All right, honey. I'll be in again to-morrow or next day."

"Thank you for the crayons," she said shyly. "I truly didn't mean it when I said I'd hate you. I just felt bad over my mousie." She slipped an arm about his neck and pressed her warm little lips to his. "Truly, I didn't."

"You're a darling!" laughed Kennion. "And I think we're going to be just the greatest chums that ever was."

Laughter died out of his face as he went down to rejoin Fredericka. What was the meaning of the barrier raised against her? From the attitude of the hospital people, he suspected his great-aunt. But why? Was it just sheer—well, cussedness? That she was capable of it he well knew. But this seemed too petty. Enlightenment was awaiting him. "I'm arrested, Jinky," was the girl's greeting.

"Arrested! When? What for?"

"It's all in here." She waved a legal form at him. He seized it.

"That isn't a warrant," he said, relieved. "It's service

in a damage suit. Tompkins, Fiske & Ruyland, Attorneys for the Plaintiff," he added, his face darkening. "They're Aunt Augusta's lawyers. What the devil! Where's the phone?"

"What are you going to do?" she asked curiously.

"Nothing, just now." He had recovered himself. "We'll eat first. Even though you are a criminal, I'm not above taking you to the Country Club for lunch."

"Kind of you," she admitted, getting into the car. "How's Dorrie?"

"Getting on swimmingly. The operation was completely successful. She's crazy about you."

"I thought it was you. Well, I shan't be jealous. Not yet for a while."

"I don't like that lawsuit," he broke out, after they had found a place on the club porch. "Of course I'm responsible if anything comes of it, but it's the rotten publicity—"

"Of course you're not responsible," she interposed. "It was my fault, and it's my affair alone. Though, as for fifty thousand dollars—"

"Oh, rot! They'll never get a tenth of it. They'll never get a cent, probably, if you want to fight it. But what gets me is our firm taking it. They don't touch damage suits."

"Do you remember your amiable aunt threatening me the day of the accident?"

"Just what was in my mind," he admitted gloomily.

"Telephone for Mr. Kennion Ruyland," wearily intoned a club "buttons." "Telephone for Mist—"

"All right," said Kennion, and went to the booth. Soon he was back, looking queer. "It's the Grandante," said he. "After us again to come down after lunch."

"Us. Does she know I'm in town, then?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Oh, she has ways of knowing everything."

"Has she!" There was light contempt in the girl's voice. "I suppose she's been having us sleuthed."

"No; I don't really believe she'd—"

"You *do*. You know it. Kennion! You don't think she knows—"

"No, dearest. How could she?"

"If we've been followed—"

"Oh, out here, possibly. But hardly in New York."

"I think I'd like to see her," said Fredericka slowly.

"Good. I'll tell her we'll be along in an hour."

"You're not coming," said she, smiling.

"I'm *not*! How do you make that out?"

"I'd rather see her alone, this first time."

"Well, I'll be— But look here, Ricky—"

"Yes. I want to. And—Jinks—do you mind—if I ask you something?"

"Of course not. What is it, darling?"

"Just—not to call me"—her voice faltered—"that."

"What?" he said, bewildered. "Darling, you mean?"

"Of *course* not. I love it. Don't be so stupid."

"Then what is it?"

"Ricky. That's always been so much mother's own name for me and nobody else's. That is—" She hesitated, and for the moment her face was dim with memory. "Well, anyway, it's mother's special name. You don't mind, do you, dearest?"

His face cleared. "I'd be an idiot if I did. Just jump on me if I forget."

She took a breath. For the moment she had been appalled at herself. It had slipped from her lips, half unawares, that plea. And there was so much implied, betrayed in that reservation. Yet it had passed above his head. He had not interpreted it, any more than she

would have acknowledged it hitherto, as a withholding from him some inner part of herself, something which, perhaps, she would always withhold. Never the fullest surrender.

At that realization dread beset her. She put it out of her mind, turned with relief to the immediate outlook, the imminent encounter. As he drove her downtown her spirits rose. The overbrooding Rock failed to daunt them. Its peanut-brittle entrance and the incredible mélange of architecture crowning the harsh dignity of the pile, were both ludicrous and reassuring. Surely nothing very formidable could lurk in so ridiculous a retreat. She sought similes and decided that The Rock was like a noble and austere bust upon which some one had set, awry, a battered plug hat. Or a pasteboard castle shoved aslant by a mischievous hand. Or a geometrical design contrived by a parodist on Euclid, a malicious-minded parod— What was Kennion saying? She called in her wandering wits to answer:

"No, dear. I truly don't want you to go in with me at all."

He accepted it dubiously. But she wished that he had not looked quite so relieved. His awe of the Grand-ante, masked though it was under a lightsome pretense, made him a little meager-spirited in the eyes of his lover. Ah, well, it was just a part of his faunishness. He was too remote, too indifferent to fight unless it was forced upon him. Later on that might come, she guessed.

"Am I going to be the one to bring turmoil into his life?" she thought.

"You'd better telephone me at the City Club," he said. Then, a little uneasily: "How much are you going to tell her?"

"That depends on what line she takes. And on what you want me to do."

"Oh, I'm quite willing to leave it to you. I'll stay at the club till I hear from you. You won't be very long, will you?"

"No; I don't suppose I'll be very long." She mocked his lugubrious tone. "If I survive, that is. If not, you can identify the mangled remains in the moat by the jade anklet on the left leg."

Entering the tall, dim room into which she was at once ushered, Fredericka felt the first chill fall upon her spirit. Her primary impression was one of immeasurable distance to be traversed before she could reach the erect figure seated in the straight, thronelike chair. Once in an early venture into private theatricals she had felt toward the black, breathing pit of the audience not unlike what she now felt. Out beyond was something which she knew to be human and harmless; yet there was a strange, formidable emanation from it. All this time she was walking—and she walked well, with a free boyish stride—along the deep-piled rug that led to the throne steps.

Was the figure there going to rise or remain enthroned? Speak or be silent? Stare or brood? At the last moment, but not too late for courtesy, it rose, revealing itself as slenderer and shorter than her recollection from the day of the accident.

"I appreciate your coming," said the grave, assured voice. "Will you sit there?"

"There" was the one spot in the room under a direct light. "Thank you," said Fredericka, and sat down.

"My grandnephew?" came the quiet inquiry.

"Sent his apologies. Another engagement, I believe."

"He has spoken to me of you"—the visitor nodded as the other paused—"only once. And then he said nothing."

So it was to be war. Fredericka knew her way now. "What can I add to it?" she inquired.

"Whatever you think needful to the occasion."

"I'm afraid you mistake the situation, Miss Ruyland—"

"*Mrs.* Ruyland, if you please."

"Stupid of me," apologized the caller hastily. She bit her lip, annoyed at herself, but nevertheless curiously analyzing the instinctive feeling which had led her into the error. She knew, of course, that this woman had been married, had lived through the experiences of wedlock and childbirth; yet her own sensitive femininity had inferred some strange phenomenon of personality in the older woman, as if the years had obliterated all trace of wifehood and motherhood in her inner soul, as if she had faded and narrowed and hardened into an all-forgetful recrudescence of withered maidhood. So much of the warmth and color of life had gone out of her, leaving a surface of chill, polished gray.

Augusta Ruyland's eyes were intent upon the younger woman, as in search of her meaning and perhaps conjecturing it, for a slow color rose in her face.

"You were imputing a mistake to me," she said coldly. "What mistake, pray?"

"The mistake of assuming that I came here in the rôle of a candidate for a position, ready to state my qualifications."

"To be the wife of Kennion Ruyland is a position of some importance."

The girl smiled, undisturbed. "I'm not exactly a candidate for that, desirable though it may seem from many points of view."

"From any point of view." Without change of tone she added: "You are painted. I do not approve of paint."

"You don't need it," was the prompt response. "You've got a skin like a snow-apple."

In spite of herself Augusta Ruyland smiled. Mingled with the smile was the acknowledgment to herself that here was a difficult opponent. No expression of defiance or attitude of daring would have so much impressed the shrewd and experienced old brain as the admiring good humor of that frank little compliment. "The snow of a good many winters," she retorted. She paused, not from hesitation but to give her words more impact.

"Are you in love with my nephew?"

"Has he told you that he loved me?" (Decidedly this young person was firmly planted on her feet.)

"It is plain to be seen that he is interested in you."

"Well, I'm interested in him. He's an awfully interesting character. Don't you find him so?"

"What I may think of him is beside the question, which is that of your attitude toward him."

"How can I explain it to you?" mused the girl. "Love is such a complicated affair. Have you ever been in love?"

The expression of the questioner's face, thrust a little forward, eyes alight, was one of almost comradely interest. Woman to woman! So far as she could remember, nobody had ever asked Augusta Ruyland, born and bred and wed Augusta Ruyland, such a question. An augmented hue crept up under the smooth skin which the visitor had admired. Augusta Ruyland felt that it would be quite possible to like this frank and self-possessed child in other circumstances. But this was no time for such considerations. She was not for Kennion! "You may assume that I have a basis for my question," said she, ignoring the return question. "Though your definition and mine might differ."

"Probably. Since our ages differ. And each period

has its own catchwords. But I wouldn't think the facts would be so different but that we could understand each other."

"That is quite unimportant, so long as you clearly understand me," said the older woman dryly. "I may tell you that when I first saw you with my nephew I assumed—and afterward I quite hoped, I may add—that you were a professional bad woman."

"He had something of the same idea at first, but he did not presume on it."

"Now I know it is worse," pursued the even voice, grown relentless. "I learn that you are only an amateur and therefore the more difficult."

"I suppose I ought to feel insulted. But if I am, I don't seem to mind it much. I'm more interested in wondering what makes you think I'm bad."

"Your manners. Your way of going about. Information which comes to me about your fast set in New York. Degenerate children of decent folk!"

"Do you mean technically bad?"

The Grandante rose, her eyes glooming. "I mean that you are no fit wife for Kennion Ruyland, and you are not going to be permitted to marry him."

The girl's eyes wandered away from the forbidding face before her. Her lips parted, trembled, grew tender. Suddenly a blighting sense of her loveliness struck to the soul of the older woman. Yes; it was plain enough why Kennion had become infatuated with her; more than plain why the infatuation must be cured. . . . Wasn't the girl going to say anything? What did that enigmatic and dream-soft smile of hers mean? Her eyes came back to the world of fact, of struggle, of conflict; she spoke in her strange voice.

"We were married last week," said she simply.

CHAPTER SEVEN

STILLNESS succeeded that pregnant assertion. Upon the girl's lips the dreaming smile still lingered. It did not fail under the stare of the old woman in the high-backed antique. "You are Kennion's wife?" Less of a query than a reluctant, a bitter acceptance.

"Yes."

"When were you married? Where? By whom?"

"On the 7th. By a justice of the peace. In Dutchess County, New York."

"A secret marriage. Why? Was it necessary?"

"No. It was not necessary." The young wife spoke crisply but without resentment. "Nor was it secret. My mother was with us."

"No Ruyland was ever before married by a justice of the peace."

"My fault. I don't like the church service. It goes too far. Besides, I've always considered getting married a particularly private and personal matter between the two people most concerned, not a peep show for the curious."

"So it would appear. I suppose you have your certificate."

"My 'lines'? How truly third-acty." A gleam of pure mischief shone in her eyes as she drew herself up and declaimed from an out-thrown chest: "As God is my witness I am an honest woman and I can prove it to the whole world."

"Spare me your play-acting." Augusta Ruyland sat, deeply absorbed.

Her visitor rose. "Is there anything more you want me to tell you, Mrs. Ruyland?" she asked simply.

"Would you kindly press that button behind you? Thank you."

Another silence followed, broken by the arrival of the secretary.

"Miss Owen, send out invitations for a family dinner, Wednesday, the 20th."

"Sixteen, Mrs. Ruyland?"

"Twenty-six." This, had Fredericka known it, meant the total inner circle of the clan, the royal family. "And a general reception afterward—I'll check up the lists—to meet Mrs. Kennion Ruyland. This is she. Miss Owen, my secretary."

After one startled glance Miss Owen bowed, murmured something, and withdrew.

"It's very kind of you, Mrs. Ruyland," said Fredericka.

"Why didn't my nephew come with you?" demanded the other, ignoring the courtesy.

"I didn't want him. I preferred to come alone."

"Was he ashamed? Or just afraid?"

The lucent color rose under Fredericka's clear skin. "Do you take pleasure in making people fear you, Mrs. Ruyland?"

"I expect people to respect me," was the uncompromising reply.

"It ought not to be the same thing."

"It usually is. You came here alone to show me that you weren't afraid of me."

"Bravado?" The girl seemed to be questioning herself. "Perhaps there was a touch of that. But it wasn't all bravado."

"It wasn't for the purpose of informing me of your marriage to my nephew. Not when you first came."

"That's shrewd of you. No; it wasn't."

"What changed your plan?"

"I didn't want you to go too far; to say things which would have made it impossible for us to be anything but enemies. Whatever you might say to Fredericka Gage, I knew there were things that you'd never say to Kennion's wife."

"And that's shrewd of *you*. Though it is my custom to say what I please to whom I please. So in spite of your courage, you took shelter behind Kennion's name."

"Mrs. Ruyland, can't I make you understand that I really am not afraid of you? Why should I be?"

"Nobody has any reason to be afraid of me, if they'll just be sensible and behave themselves."

"But that's pure tyranny!"

"You are calling me a tyrant?"

"What else is it when by 'well-behaved' you plainly mean acting according to your ideas and not their own? What satisfaction can you find in living in a world of automaton? No; wait. Please! I don't mean to quarrel with you, for Kennion's sake if for no other reason. It would only make things harder for him. He's really devotedly fond of you."

A flash of expression made up of pride, bitterness, and affection livened the hard-controlled old face. "A curious way to show it, by a clandestine marriage."

"Call it clandestine if you wish. I don't consider it so."

"Have you begun your married life yet?"

"That is our own affair, Mrs. Ruyland," returned the girl imperturbably.

"You may as well call me Aunt Augusta." It was put forth with an effect of the grudging extension of a valuable privilege.

"No; I think not," decided the other. "It wouldn't mean anything. And"—she laughed a little—"you may

force a fight on me yet. I don't want it. I'll do anything in reason to avoid it. But I will *not* live in fear of you."

"I do not fight," retorted Augusta Ruyland. Her manner implied, "I crush."

Fredericka rose. She walked over and held out her hand. "Thank you very much for the party," said she. "It'll be nice to meet the family that way. May I telephone Jinky from here?"

"Silly name for him," declared the old lady witheringly. "Isn't the name his family gave him good enough for his wife?"

"Much too good for human nature's daily food," she returned gayly. "Jinky isn't nearly so Ruylandish. But it's awfully like him in the way I love him most. I won't use it, though, in the family's hearing, if you don't like it."

"I don't," barked Augusta Ruyland.

Kennion broke the traffic rules like a true Ruyland to get to Fredericka. "Well?" he queried eagerly.

"Jinky, I've told her."

"Told her? Of our marriage?"

"Yes. I had to," she explained.

His face warmed. "Thank the Lord! Then there's nothing to keep us apart any longer," he said hungrily. "We'll drive back, and you can pack some things and have your trunks sent on afterward."

She regarded him with troubled eyes, then leaned to him momentarily, her shoulder pressing to his. "Yes," she said.

"If you look at me that way," he warned, "you'll get yourself kissed right here in the face of a scandalized public."

"Is the public going to be very scandalized, dear?"

"Of course not. What's it matter, anyway, what they think?"

"When I said the public, I meant the Ruylands."

"Oh!" He laughed free-heartedly. "They're going to be paralyzed. But I'm not worrying nearly so much about what they think of you as about what you'll think of them."

"What's it matter to them?" she paraphrased.

"Not much. They think mostly about themselves."

"But it does matter to you," she reflected after a time, "what the Grandante thinks of me. It matters a lot."

"She was for you, wasn't she?" His loyalty could not conceive that any one coming within the radius of her invincible charm could help but be "for" her.

"After the show-down she—well, I think she tried to make the best of me. But she's not a kind person, your great-aunt, Jinky."

"What's on your mind, dearest? Unload."

"Do you think she could ever come between us?"

"Why, she wouldn't want to," he smiled. "Now that you're a Ruyland—once a Ruyland, always a Ruyland, with the proud Augusta."

Her hand went to her chin with a little movement oddly her own. There was a strained look of incredulity in her eyes, a gleam that might almost have been interpreted as panic. "Ah, that isn't what I wanted you to say, Jinky," she returned.

"Tell me what you want me to say, and I'll say it. I'll do better than that. I'll even agree to think it."

There was no reflection of his gayety in her answer. "If I thought she had that power over you, I'd leave you to-day and never see you again."

The depth and passion of her feeling startled him. "You're morbid about this, darling."

"Am I? Do you think I don't know that we wouldn't be married now but for her?"

"I don't follow your reasoning. But if she's been working her radio to that effect, here's looking at her."

She stared straight ahead of her with foreboding eyes. "You'd never have consented to anything but a Ruyland wedding but for the knowledge that she'd never accept me without a devil of a row. And you didn't want the row."

"It's true that I'm a peaceful little dove. I've told you that. But anyway we're married. As long as I've got you, what more do I want? Oh, Freddy, darling," his voice took on a tremor that shook her, "nobody is ever going to come between you and me as long as you love me."

She slipped her arm through his and pressed it. But, within, a voice of misgiving demurred: "If only he'd said that at first!"

At the Gage home Fredericka went up to pack while her mother came down to Kennion. "You're taking her away from me sooner than I expected, Kennion," said she wistfully.

He had a flash of insight, both keen and kindly. "Nobody's ever going to be able to take Freddy away from you, Mother Gage."

"Did you say that jealously?" she smiled.

"I tried not to."

"You encourage me to do a risky and perhaps futile thing," said the mother after a pause. "I wonder how much you understand Ricky."

"How much does a man ever succeed in understanding a woman?"

"Now you're doing one of your ensnaring clevernesses.

It's true, too. Women understand men better, though it's likely to be understanding without sympathy."

"Who's being clever now, Mother Gage?"

"No; I'm not turning phrases. I'm trying to tell you that Ricky is one of those women who have both understanding and sympathy and, in a higher degree than either, loyalty. Yet at the same time she's tremendously an individualist. She'll always be herself; but she'll always be yours too, intensely if never completely. There's a personality there that will never be surrendered, and yet—oh, it's so difficult to express clearly—yet she'll immerse herself in your interests and your personality, and so unobtrusively that you'll hardly know it." She paused. "If," she added, and stopped.

"If?" he prompted.

"The reason she wouldn't go through a church ceremony," continued the mother, leaving her conditional hanging in the air, "is that essentially she mistrusts words. She doesn't promise; she performs. Once she trusts you, she will 'grapple you to her soul with hooks of steel.'"

"After my 'adoption tried'?" He caught up the allusion lightly, but his eyes were scrutinizing and serious.

"Not that she'll consciously put you on trial. Ricky loves you very dearly. You've caught her imagination and fired it, and fired her, body and spirit, through it. But, Kennion dear. if you ever fail her—"

"Why should I fail her? You don't think, Mother Gage, that, because I've lived abroad and perhaps got some of their ways of looking at things, my moral fiber is loosened? We Ruylands aren't rotters."

"No. You're Ruylands. And I wasn't thinking of unfaithfulness in the accepted sense. I can even imagine Ricky forgiving that in some circumstances, though I

think it would hurt her terribly. But if ever you disappointed her loyalty, if ever she looked to you and you weren't there——"

"But I'll be there," he cried. "There's nothing that—— Here she is," he added, dropping his voice.

"Where'll you be, Jinky?" demanded the gay lilt of Fredericka from the stairs.

"In Habersham before midnight, if we start now. All ready, Mrs. Ruyland?" He caught her look of appeal. "I'll just run out and give the old bus the eye test," he added, and kissed Mrs. Gage warmly.

It was a swift, rather silent ride, back through the sunset glow into the deepening shades until, under the fragrant warmth of a light rain, they drew up before the house from which the two cousins who were Kennion's parents had gone forth twenty years before to meet death on the fated *Moravia*; a broad, squat, brown mass standing flush to both streets of a corner. Only one light shone in it.

Kennion Ruyland's wife stopped before the door, which he had unlocked with an old-fashioned brass key and thrown open. She stared into the dim interior as into a cavern of the years, filled with what purports, what portents? Joys, sorrows, strange bonds, new intimacies with life, readjustments of her own indestructible personality to the unknown world ahead. Back of all, vast, shadowy figures that wavered and altered and lured and repelled with all the potencies of mystery and promise. Was this one perhaps Death? And that other Birth? Awed, she felt a sense of that terrifying and eternal capacity, innate in her woman's body, to hand on life, to form one link in that obscure and mighty chain which had begun far back of anything but the primordial desire of life to perpetuate itself, and which would end—where?

To burden her soul with the responsibility for other beings, themselves taking on responsibility to all the world of struggle, endeavor, desire, ambition, love and hatred, creation and destruction, themselves not all hers who was to bear them but subtly commingled with another—with thousands of others. Deep in the darkness she seemed to discern the long lines, stretching back into the centuries, potent for what men in their dim and narrow vision call good or evil.

Insensibly she shrunk away; her groping hand met and clung to the railing. Her husband stood waiting, holding out something toward her, something which gleamed in the dull light. What? She recognized it as the great key. "You want me to take it?" she asked uncertainly.

"Yes."

She accepted it; stood, holding it. Heavy in her hand!

"Is it a custom?"

"Yes. Of the Ruylands. Of *us*."

"Kennion, does it—does it lock on the inside?"

"The door? Why, yes."

"Must I lock myself in? I *couldn't* lock myself in, Kennion," she said pleadingly.

"What is it, darling?" Wonder and concern were in his tone. "I don't understand you."

"Ah, but I must make you understand." The seductive rhythm of her voice was hurried, but not the less potent to stir him, for that. "How can I say it without hurting you—without hurting us both? I'm giving you all that I can of me; all that's—that's givable. But perhaps it isn't enough. No; don't speak! Let me finish or it will be too hard. I love you. And I'm yours. But I'm mine too, a little. I'll never be so much of a Ruyland but that there'll be something of Fredericka Gage left, and something too—a little bit—of Ricky who has never

quite grown up. Can you understand that, Kennion? Can you understand that I can't lock myself into a life?"

Kennion Ruyland lied like a man. "Yes," he said.

She stretched out her hand and he put into it the key with which he had unlocked their future.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EVIL days for Mr. Dawley Cole. Not to have discovered and reported the wedding of Kennion Ruyland was a severe blow to his professional prestige. Short of employing private detectives to shadow Fredericka Gage—a method repugnant to his gentlemanly feelings—he did not see really how he could have been in on the news. Nevertheless he was painfully conscious of failure, and no less painfully aware of his patroness's tendency to interpret failure as a dereliction of duty. Though it was a full week since the arrival of the bridal couple in town, Cousin Augusta had not ceased to harp upon that nerve-torturing string.

What he could do toward rehabilitating himself he had done in journeying at great inconvenience to Dutchess County and collecting all available data on the justice of the peace who had performed the ceremony and two aged cousins of the bride who had signed as witnesses. These records he deprecatingly presented to Mrs. Ruyland, who received them with distasteful remarks about locking the stable door, but nevertheless filed them among the arcana. Her tyrannous collector's conscience would not permit her to discard any material having a connection, however tenuous, with the family fortunes. Aside from the romantic passion of the secret historian, one could never tell when they might develop practical value. Her *dossier* on the Gage family was already extensive, with one whole compartment devoted to records, partly journalistic, of Miss Fredericka Gage's activities.

"Do you think, Dawley," she observed after having

disposed of the papers, "that I could intrust to you a simple, a very simple errand, without putting too heavy a strain upon your intelligence—and—hum!—loyalty?"

Wincing, Mr. Cole signified with what gallantry he could muster, his readiness—yes, his eagerness—to serve his cousin in any possible capacity.

"So long as it doesn't take you from more personal and important interests," she finished for him, and again experienced the judicial satisfaction of seeing the plump pinkness of his face quiver, "I want you to go to Daniel Selover's."

"Sel— Oh, the father of the little girl who was hurt."

"When you do acquire information it is usually inaccurate. He is her grandfather. I want him to drop that suit. It must not go on now."

"Certainly not." Her line of reasoning was sufficiently easy for him to follow and fill in. Now that Fredericka had become a Ruyland, the head of the clan would rally to her aid as against all outside attack.

"I have notified my law firm to withdraw as the child's counsel."

"Rather an awkward situation for them, isn't it?"

She waved a lofty hand. "Lawyers are paid to find ways out of awkward situations."

"Of course! Of course! But in case Selover should wish to go on—"

"It will be best for him to do as he is instructed. Best for the little girl as well. You may notify him that I make myself responsible for the hospital and operative expenses."

"I have learned that Miss Ga—Mrs. Kennion Ruyland has already paid the hospital bill."

"Very proper. The operation, however, is another affair. You may also notify Selover that, upon his signing for his granddaughter a release satisfactory to my

lawyers, I will be willing to charge myself with her education up to such a point as is suitable to her position and capacities."

"Most generous of you, Cousin Augusta. *Most liberal*," purred the little man. "Far more than they have any right to expect." And off he trotted.

Daniel Selover, looking up from a collection of wheels, pins, springs, and ratchets which had been the deranged internal economy of a sea captain's bull's-eye, gave his caller brief greeting and listened carefully to the reasons for the call.

"Withdraw the suit?" he repeated. "Why should I?"

Patiently Mr. Cole explained the advantages to accrue from an amenable attitude on Mr. Selover's part, and hinted at the disadvantages attached to any other.

"That old hen," said Selover—and paused not despite the protestant gesture of the shocked Mr. Cole—"has been meddling with my lawyer."

"Her lawyer," corrected the visitor.

"My lawyer, in my case. I'm onto her. I hear young Ruyland has married that girl."

"That is true, but—"

"So if she gets stung, he has to pay the damages."

"That has nothing to do with it, my dear sir."

"Hasn't it! Think I can't see through a barn door when it's wide open? I'll get a lawyer that that old meddler can't tamper with."

"Don't be hasty, Mr. Selover. Why run the risk of losing a suit, and the certainty of offending the most important people in town by making trouble for a young girl who meant no harm—"

"That's all right. I got nothing against her. She's a nice young lady. But that's nothing to do with the rights and wrongs of the case. As for losing our suit,

I'll take a chance on that, seeing I've got the most important witness in Habersham on our side."

"And who might that be?"

Daniel Selover grinned. "Mrs. Augusta Ruyland."

"Your witness! On *your* side?"

"Sure. She saw the whole thing. Told me with her own lips she never saw a more criminal case of driving. Girl wasn't looking where she was going at all. Busy making faces at the old lady, if you can believe what *she* says. Not that I'd blame her much for that. Now because young Ruyland marries the girl, she gives orders to call it off."

"But, my dear sir," chattered the perspiring Mr. Cole. "My *dear* sir!" (Put Cousin Augusta on the stand, as witness against another Ruyland! This was terrible!) "Reflect that all bills have been paid, that your little granddaughter is physically and mentally on the road to becoming a normal child, thanks to Mrs. Ruyland's bounty—to Mrs. Ruyland's interest in her," he hurriedly amended, as he caught the look on the other man's face—"which she never would have been otherwise; that a suitable education is in prospect for her, in short that it would be most ill-advised and unfair to the child to neglect such an opportunity."

"Yes? Well, I'd rather she'd get her 'suitable' education on the money rightfully coming to her—and Mrs. Ruyland said with her own tongue it was rightfully coming to her—than out of any meddler's 'bounty.' If she'd come to me as man to man and put it up to me fair and square, I don't say but what I'd have met her halfway and maybe more'n half. But when she goes to my lawyer behind my back and works her high-and-mightiness on me, I'll give her a fight. Take that back to her, and tell her that the suit'll be withdrawn when hell

freezes over and not before, and you can smoke that in your own pipe, Mr. Bounty Man."

More unhappy even than when he had failed on his specialty of advance information, the sorry representative of Ruylandistic autocracy went reluctantly back to his principal. Diplomacy prescribed that he should concoct a message as inoffensive as possible in the offensive circumstances. It was always ticklish business telling Augusta Ruyland that matters were not going in accord with her plans. She was prone to consider in such cases that the rest of the world had got out of step with her, and to visit her justified resentment upon the nearest representative of mundane dereliction. Yes; crafty was the word. He must play for time, until some way could be found to compromise the suit. But compromise was not a safe term to use to the autocrat.

"I think perhaps I'd better see Selover again when he's had time to think matters over," he began.

She bent her formidable brows upon him. "Didn't you settle it?"

"Not wholly. It will be all right, quite all right—"

"What did he say?"

"He is not prepared—er—to consent *in toto* to your plan."

"He would do well to eat his bread before the butter melts off. What are you holding back, Dawley Cole?"

"Nothing; nothing, indeed! He merely said," returned Mr. Cole, improvising rapidly, "that since you told him the child had a sure case—"

"He lies," broke in Mrs. Ruyland.

"I don't doubt it in the least; not in the least," asserted the little man fervently. "He would. But his position is that he doesn't see what has come up to change his legal prospects."

"Then he'll have to be taught. The man's a pig-headed fool. Did you tell him of the marriage?"

"Yes. He intimated that Mrs. Kennion Ruyland was just as responsible a person to sue as Miss Fredericka Gage."

"Blackmail, eh?"

"He seems set on the idea of education for his granddaughter. Perhaps if you agreed to make a definite settlement—" Mr. Cole was taking chances, but he took them no further.

The explosion was not loud, but there was in it a terrifying sense of appalling forces still unreleased. Something, he gathered, had happened in his absence, to anger her deeply. Presently it all came out in acidulous words. She had driven downtown on an errand, and on the sidewalk had been caught by the inrush of a crowd excited by the spectacle of flames bursting from a third-story window. Jammed between two loquacious mechanics, she became aware that their conversation had a special and personal interest for her.

"He says he'll make the old cat sweat this time."

"She's got claws, though. She'll fight."

"I reckon Dan and his new lawyer have got her by the short hairs."

"They're welcome. Me, if I had holt of a wildcat, I'd rather leggo than hang on."

"Jim Branston's his lawyer; that slick guy from Morgansville." (She made a mental note of the name; had heard it before somewhere, she was sure. The archives?)

"Branston, the weeper?"

"That's the goof. What he'll do with the jury! He says he can't lose this case; that the Ruylands are mighty fond of scattering their money around on the grand, but this time it's going to be grabbed from 'em and they ain't going to have any say-so about it."

"Do 'em good," opined the other. "They're gettin' too Godalmighty for themselves."

Shivering with rage, the old lady let her errand go and hastened back to her collection. B, B-a, B-l, B-r—. Here it was, Branston. Her memory was justified of itself. She ran through the file on the man. A shyster lawyer, a corporation baiter, an ambulance chaser, a presumptive blackmailer once cited in disbarment proceedings, counsel for a labor union and, to add the final touch of infamy, successful prosecutor of damage suits against several large factories whose imported strike-breakers had maimed and killed local workmen. That kind of reptile! He was boasting what he'd do to the Ruylands in their own town, was he? She would teach him something. And here was Dawley Cole hinting at compromise.

The lines of her cheek were like hewn granite as she turned upon the well-meaning little man. "Settlement!" said Augusta Ruyland. "*Settlement?*" And then Mr. Cole, hardly believing his stricken ears, heard a strange echo of a painful sentiment. "I'll settle with that skunk when hell freezes over and not before."

CHAPTER NINE

ONE week had passed since Fredericka Ruyland came to live in the house of her husband. Not one of the family had called on her in that time. Going about town with Kennion, familiarizing herself with the machinery of her new career, she had met them casually; mostly the women; Esther, wife of Calvin; Elberta of the fringed violet eyes; Mrs. Schuyler Ruyland, who was not born to the name but had so thoroughly absorbed the tribal thought and standards as to be accepted without reserve; Gertrude, widow of Thornsbury; Alice, Martha, and Matilda, the three old-maid sisters, withered golfers of the early fifties (years, not scores); Mary Denning Ruyland, who had her husband's given name inserted in the midst of her own to distinguish her from Mary Hale Ruyland, thirty and regarded as a bluestocking because she was supposed, erroneously, to be intelligent; that ancient ruin of a gadabout, Mrs. Capron Ruyland (what queer names most of 'em have, thought the bride) who had taken to the movies at eighty; the Harlan Ruyland twins, with just about as much vitality and color of life between them as would have properly gone to the making of one normal female specimen; Mrs. Norval, dullest and most self-satisfied of created Ruylands, and more other variously connected "queers" than she could possibly catalogue or remember. Frightfully dowdy they were, as a type, yet there was something about them—what was it? Not dignity, not distinction certainly—a sort of assuredness that impressed the newcomer. They were guardedly polite to her in an incurious way. But as far as any

welcome or hospitality went, both they and she might have been homeless nomads.

At first she wondered whether this was a boycott. Then, having a distinct talent for thinking things out, she arrived at an appreciation of the status. Socially she would be nonexistent as a Ruyland until the feudal head of the clan performed the rite of formal adoption. Hence the projected dinner. Thereafter the temporary isolation did not annoy her. In fact, she found it convenient, for there was much to be done in the square, rigid house overcrowded with a heterogeneous *mélange* of furnishings, to make it a human, married home. She went about it happily, warmed and amused by Kennion's incomprehension of method and appreciation of results.

"Beginning to like the old joint better, Jinky?" she asked, after the dinner which marked the close of their first week of life together.

"It's all freshened up," he replied, sniffing the air gustfully. "Bringing you is like bringing flowers into a place; it takes on your fragrance."

"Pretty compliment, for an old married woman," she laughed.

"I wonder if you'll ever fade," he mused.

"Not as long as I can help it," was the prompt reply. "I'm too wise a woman. Your Ruyland women fade. Faded Ruylands! Suggests faded garlands, doesn't it?"

"What do you think of us as far as you've got?"

"I'm not going to tell you yet. In fact, I'm not going to talk to you at all. You're a social outcast for the evening. Why don't you go over to the club?"

"And leave you here alone? What's the strange idea?"

"Wisdom of the serpent. I'm taking measures in advance against the subtle poison of monotony."

"You talk as if you had the experience of a thousand

years behind you. How many times have you been married before, in this or some previous existence, young lady?"

"Not any. And I may never be again. Therefore I'm going to make this time a success if it can be done. Come along!" She flapped at him like a housewife evicting a fly. "Clear out. Shoo!"

"But, darling!" He laughed, but there was a pucker between his slightly slanted eyes. "What'll I do at the club? It's a dull hole."

"Won't there be any Ruylands there?" she asked slyly.

"No. We're all too good family men. And what'll you do while I'm gone?"

"Think, perhaps. About you."

"Nice things?"

She smiled caressingly at the fatuity. "Very critical things," she retorted. "That's one reason I want you away. I can't think critically, or even reasonably about you when you're near enough to touch."

"You dear! What kind of critical things?"

"Oh, well, to begin with—what a queer husband you are."

"Queer? Diagram, please."

"Old-fashioned. For all the bluff you put up at being a wild, fauny thing caught and jammed into distasteful clothes—I've got you *much* better groomed since I took charge of you—essentially you're a Ruyland, a bred-in-the-bone, stick-in-the-mud, obstinate, resistant old Ruyland."

"How little the poor innocent knows her husband! Obstinate? Resistant? I'm much too lazy not to drift with the current. To be old-fashioned, you've got to be anchored firm."

"Is there any current here?" said she, half to herself.

"The water's deeper than you might think," he answered more gravely. "But what, in particular, do you consider me old-fashioned about?"

"Your wife." She set her hands on his shoulders and laughed up into his face. "You don't really want me to do anything, do you!"

"What is there for you to do?"

"Except be a Ruyland wife," she concluded. "That's really all you expect of me."

"No; not all," he said significantly.

Her voice dropped too. "Ah! That's different—and future. This is present."

"Well, what is it you want to do?"

"How do I know? I haven't got my bearings yet. Something to keep me feeling alive."

"'Alive,' quoth she! Could anything but an electric spark be as alive as you are?"

"But you don't keep alive," pronounced the little wiseacre, "just by living. That sounds like a paradox, but it isn't."

"I'm sure this is a much more improving conversation than I'll find at the club," said he lazily. He dropped into the corner of the divan and stretched out his arms to her. "Come over here and philosophize."

She regarded him with severity. "I'm not to be wheedled by any husbandly wiles. Have I got to drive you out?"

"It's very hard," he complained, "just when one is settling down to a quiet, domestic Wednesday evening—"

"It isn't Wednesday; it's Thursday."

He sat up jerkily. "Thursday? Good Lord!"

"Something important?"

"Rather! I was due at The Rock for dinner."

"Were you?" asked Fredericka evenly. "I hadn't heard anything about it."

"Didn't I speak of it?" His manner was the perfection of caressing carelessness. "Every Thursday evening I'm due at The Rock. The excitement and rush of all this getting married business drove it completely out of my mind."

"Something must have driven it completely out of Mrs. Ruyland's mind that you've been getting married," observed his wife, "since I am apparently not included."

"Oh, you will be," he assured her, but without conviction, "as soon as she gets adjusted to the idea."

Fredericka had her doubts. "Is this an every Thursday evening performance?"

"Why, it always has been," he replied deprecatingly.

"And what am I supposed to do with my Thursdays?"

"What you like. Go and see some of the women-folk," he suggested.

"Yes; I'm safe enough. Opportunities for mischief aren't so common in Habersham."

His smile was indulgence itself. "Are you jealous of the Grandante, Freddy?"

At that she spoke a word with roots deep in feminine nature. "Do you think a woman can be jealous only of love?"

He fidgeted. "But it's a regular Ruyland custom, these Thursdays."

"And that doesn't make it any better."

"I'd hate to disappoint her. She's an old woman, Freddy. I don't suppose she'll have many years to live."

"She'll live forever."

He stood up, uncertain. "You don't want me to go? What could I say to her?"

At that she experienced for the first time a strange feeling about Kennion, as if by some mysterious inner process he were receding from her. Not so much that

he was escaping her, as that he was thinning out in personality, becoming insubstantial, impalpable.

"What's the matter?" he asked with a laugh. "You're looking at me as if I were a ghost."

The telephone saved her the necessity of reply. "You answer it," she said.

After a brief interval he came back from the hallway. A puzzled smile quirked his mouth. "You wouldn't guess in a hundred years," said he, "so I'll save you brain fag and tell you. It's Dawley Cole."

"What does he want?"

"That's the queer part of it. Wants to know if we're at home this evening."

"Oh-h-h-h-h!" Her voice soared. "That means—"

"It means all sorts of things."

"But principally the Grandante, doesn't it?"

"Shrewd child! It does. He's an emissary, all right."

"Then fly! Hurry! Away! Leave him to me."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Vamp him within an inch of his poor little life. What I'll do to that innocent and aged party, Jinky!"

"But what for?"

"Information. That's what he's coming here for, isn't it? Well, if he doesn't give more than he gets, I'm a dud. I'll run up and put on my war paint."

Like most amateur sleuths, Dawley Cole was a chatterer. And like most bachelors of his age he was susceptible to the charm of much younger women, though the susceptibility in his case was mild and innocent enough. He ambled into the parlor—which was the bane of Fredericka's planning soul already, since she had thus far not successfully figured out any way to make it stop being a parlor—looking rather like a neat and interested bird. Punctiliously he introduced himself and punctiliously inquired after Kennion. That his eyebrows did

not lift, upon his learning where the young husband had gone, is testimony to his facial control, which, however, was not complete: they did twitch once.

Five minutes Fredericka had allotted herself for the usual introductory banalities. The time had stretched to fifteen, with the visitor prattling happily, for he was adept at this sort of thing and enjoyed his own skill, when she decided upon direct action.

"Tell me what you want to find out," she drawled, "and I'll do what I can to help you."

"Find out?" The little man, startled, gave a little flick of his shoulders, like a bird before it springs into the air. "About what?"

"Me," she answered sweetly.

"But, my dear Mrs. Ruyl—"

"Oh, you may call me Fredericka. It's all in the family."

"A privilege." He bowed, but his look was distrustful. "Let me assure you that I haven't the slightest intention or desire—"

"Aren't interested enough in the subject?" Her lower lip drooped in a travesty of hurt pride.

"Enormously. But—but— You leave me at a loss."

Her laughter bubbled out, mockingly musical, but friendly. "Don't let me rattle you. If you don't want to find out, I do. Tell me all about it."

"About what?" he repeated himself.

"The Great Clan Ruyl, of course. What else is there in Habersham?"

"Where shall I begin?" Caution was in his eyes.

"With the dinner party. That's a look-over, isn't it?"

"A wha—oh, I see. Well, yes; it is."

"Then be a nice kind cousin and give me pointers."

A suspicion which had been gathering form and substance in the Dawley Cole interior now took on the tem-

poral life of words. "I think you are perfectly competent to take care of yourself without aid from me—or any other human being."

Upon this her expression and even her posture changed magically. She drooped. She became a pleading child. "But I'm awfully young. And I'm so alone here."

Instantly Mr. Cole became protective. He was even about to be impulsive, when from the guarded depths of one of those steel boxes in the Conspiratory a memory flashed its wireless connection with the birdlike Cole intellect. "You were, if I remember right, one of the best amateur ingénues that ever acted with the Comedy Club," he remarked.

This time her laughter was frank. "You're good, Cousin Dawley! You're very good!" She held out her hand and he took it. "I know we're going to have fun together in this queer little corner. And I hope we're going to be friends and allies."

"Allies? That implies an enemy. I'm sure you have no enemies."

"Oh, if you insist on playing clever with me!" As he lifted protestant hands she added: "Even in peaceful Habersham I imagine there might be knives in the dark, and that one wouldn't be the worse for friendly advice."

"My dear Mrs. Ruy—Cousin Fredericka, I am entirely at your service."

"Don't look so terrified when you make that rash avowal. I won't ask you anything compromising to your clan loyalty. About the dinner, now; whom will I sit next to?"

"Mrs. Ruyland."

"What! The Grandante? Is this a hen party?"

"Oh, no. But that's the custom of The Rock. You're guest of honor."

"Who'll be on the other side of me? My husband?"



A Universal-Jewel-Production.

~ "NO WOMAN WITH AN INDECENT DRESS CAN SIT AT MY TABLE."

Siege.

He missed the minor sarcasm. "Norval, I should think."

"Do I know him?"

"A heavy-set, dark man, very quiet and reserved. Solid brown mustache and big glasses. Deliberate in his speech."

"Oh, heavens, yes! *That* vivacious soul. The only time I met him he imparted to me the probability that we were going to have a change for the milder, with all the air of—of ancestral voices prophesying war. What on earth might one find to talk about that would interest him?"

"Falconry. That is his hobby."

"*Falconry?*" She hurled herself back among the cushions and clasped one of them to her breast in an ecstasy of mirth, thereby giving Mr. Cole occasion to reflect that she was a delicious creature, but perhaps a little lacking in the dignity expected from a Ruyland. "Imagine that fat and tired business man tripping about his garden-close in slashed doublet and doeskin tights with a hooded eagle on his medieval wrist." She declaimed:

"Your tiercel's too long at hack, sire; he's no eyass,
But a passage-hawk that footed, ere we caught him,
Dangerously free o' the air."

Where does he keep 'em? In the garage?"

"He doesn't keep any. He's only an expert on the subject and his literature is the most comprehensive in this country. By the way, you seem to know something of the subject yourself."

"Because I quoted the Kipling line? Not a thing. But I will, before that dinner. The romantic and falconious Norval—what a delicious name for him—is important, I expect?"

"Quite. He is Mrs. Ruyland's right-hand man."

"Meaning that she can bully him the easiest? There, calm yourself. I won't ruffle you up with any more treasonable utterances. Is he married?"

"Very much." Mr. Cole was expanding.

"Pecking hen?"

"Quite otherwise."

"Oh, yes; I've got her. Skinny woman with a man-nequin' head and mothball eyes. Well, that's that. Where'll you be at the table? Within reach of a hail for help?"

"Probably not. I'm only a near-Ruyland, so I'll be down at the foot."

"Rescue me after dinner, won't you? I know it's going to be *baneful*."

Mr. Cole permitted himself a twinkle. "It will. But it's like the gantlet. If you get through alive, you don't have to repeat it."

"Now," said she, "be even nicer than you have been and tell me about the mills and business things."

When Kennion returned they were deep in a conversation which suffered a definite check from his arrival. The caller had a suppressed but obvious wonder-whether-I've-been-saying-too-much air. But when he took his leave, after a discreet interval, he whispered to Kennion in the hallway, pitching his tone so that it *might* be overheard by keen ears in the parlor! "Charming, my boy. Perfectly charming! And intelligent—ah!"

"You've enlisted an ally, dearest," observed the young husband, coming back to her.

"I'll need all I can get," she predicted.

"Oh, nonsense! They'll all be crazy over you when they know you. What did you do to Dawley?"

She made significant motions with her right arm.

"Oh! You did the pumping. Successful?"

"Not so bad. At least I got as much out of him as he did out of me."

He smiled tolerantly. "Know all about me now, dearest?"

"Patting your own back, aren't you, like a contortionist?" she taunted. "We hardly mentioned you except as part of the business."

"Is that what you talked about? The business?"

"The Ruyland Paper Company," she averred solemnly. "Why haven't you ever told me about it, Jinks?"

"Why should I bother you with it?"

"We—ell, it's your business, isn't it?"

"Yes. But—"

"Then it's my business," she cut in with an effect of invincible logic. "What do you think a wife is for, anyway? Just to pet?"

He twinkled at her. "Well, if you're bored already with being petted—"

"I'm not, Jinksy, and you know it. Come over here at once and sit by me. But—but—stop it, Jinksy! I want to use that face for talking—that isn't all of married life, you know."

"Neither are the mills. In fact, they aren't any part of it. Unless, that is, you're looking for a job in them," he added good-humoredly, "and will promise to bring back your pay envelope every Saturday night."

"It might come to the job yet," she retorted. "You have women in some departments, don't you?"

"Not Ruyland women."

"Pardon, Cæsar," she smiled. "For the moment I forgot that I was all classified and tagged. But I'm beginning to see certain things."

"Such as?"

"Why Augusta Ruyland puts it all over you—all of you."

"Bubble on, fount of wisdom. Why?"

"Because you're only men, and there's never been a woman in the business with courage and cleverness to stand up against her."

"Rudolph's wife tried."

"What became of her?"

"Nervous prostration or something."

"Kennion! How *does* she do it? Dawley Cole says she isn't actually the owner."

"She isn't. But she runs the board."

"Who are the board?"

"Norval, Josephus, John, Calvert Ruyland-Marsh, Peter W., 3rd, Mahlon, a few don't-matterers, and I. I'm one of the few who doesn't represent an individual factory, for which he is solely responsible. They decided to keep me on the scientific and investigatory side for the whole concern. That suits me; I'm no executive."

"You've only just gone on, haven't you?"

"Yes; in my Uncle Mark Ruyland's place."

"Mark? I haven't heard much of him."

"No, and you won't. Black sheep. Taboo!"

"What did he do?"

"Got divorced. Don't blame him under the circumstances. But the Grandante wouldn't have it and made the board fire him."

"Does the board always do exactly as she says?"

"Always."

"What kind of men are they?" she cried indignantly.

"Prudent. She's usually right, and if she's wrong there's no use fighting her because she goes ahead anyway, and she can always depend upon John and Calvert to follow her like little lambs, and Norval isn't much better. You see, dearest, she's so darn set and so darn successful; we turn paper into money almost as easily as if we printed the banknotes ourselves."

"Tell me about the Grampian."

"The what-ian?"

"Grampian, goose!" she declaimed sonorously. "'My name is Norval: on the Grampian hills my father feeds his flocks—' Do you mean to say that nobody's ever had the imagination to call Norval that? Why, it's elementary. What's more, he looks like a grampus, just to make it stick. But maybe it isn't allowed to joke about a Ruyland's name. How old is he?"

"In years, somewhere short of forty. In spirit, somewhere about the Ming dynasty. Why the warmth of interest in him?"

"I think it's too entrancing that he should keep falcons, though I believe it's only books about them that he keeps."

Kennion chuckled. "No; the poor chap does keep a brace of mangy specimens surreptitiously."

"Oh, I think it's pathetic! Is he afraid the Grandante will turn them loose if she finds out?"

"More that she'll make a guy of him. She's got an acid tongue and a venomous sense of humor. How much did Dawley tell you about her?"

"More than he meant to. I read between the lines. I know all her pet hates."

"Then you know a lot. Let's hear you recite your little lesson."

She checked them off on her pink fingers. "Cigarettes, divorce, people that stammer, mosquitoes, interruptions, modern poetry, feminism, onions, prohibition, pink, labor unions, and puns. How's that?"

"Go to the head. Did he give away her pet likes too?"

"One. You."

"Are you jealous?"

"A little."

He laughed again. "It's good for you: gives me a hold

over you. But I'm afraid you needn't be. It's natural enough, though, that she should have a *beguin* for me. She brought me up after father and mother were drowned, until it was time to send me away to school."

"And now she wants to own you."

"Oh, she wants to own everybody. Let her want! She's a good old party, after all, even if she does want her own way. Did it ever occur to you, honey, that this house has two floors and that it's after eleven o'clock?"

She jumped up, hooking her arm through his. "All right, Jinky-boy. I won't worry about her—till I have to."

But, up in their room, as she threw open the window for the night, she stood gazing out at the bulk of The Rock, blackly dominant over the twinkling city. It looked immemorial. And impregnable.

CHAPTER TEN

ALWAYS thereafter Fredericka would remember that dinner as the Inquisition of the Ghosts. It was set in the long, shadowed dining-room of The Rock, and served by the fleshless dead who had presumptively been women and servitresses in a former existence. Ancient Ruylands gloomed or smirked down from the walls. Other Ruylands, less ancient, but hardly less wraithly, glided about murmuring. From time to time, one or another came up and haunted her momentarily with meaningless family remarks, then moved silently on. In the midst of these punctilious shades, Augusta Ruyland seemed almost malignly alive.

She stood at the far end of the narrow apartment, observantly regarding everything that Fredericka did. Fredericka did nothing. It seemed wisest. She was not awed; but she was depressed, out of tone. Even Kennion seemed to have put off the flesh and taken on for the time, together with his rather too flowing evening clothes, an effect of impalpability. She felt overvitalized, almost vulgarly so. Then she caught Elberta's veiled, violet gaze, and felt better. There seemed to be some indication of living emotion in it, directed toward herself. But what emotion? It struck Fredericka that it might be hatred. Why hatred? Because Kennion had loved her and not the other? But Elberta cared nothing for Kennion; was already betrothed to Josephus, presumably by order of the chieftainness of the clan. Not jealousy, then. Fredericka resolved to try the girl out if opportunity offered. A healthy human emotion, even

though hostile, would be reassuring in that environment.

The she-wraiths passed around glasses and filled them with a pallid brown liquid. Fredericka tasted cautiously, and proceeded without hesitation, though she did not appreciate that she was drinking an ancient monastery sherry from California equal to the choicest product of Spain. But the mere fact of an appetizer in those austere surroundings was a surprise. Presently another and also a pleasing one was afforded in the news that an urbane and chatty bishop, arriving in town unexpectedly, had supplanted her in the place of honor. Escorted to her seat, she found herself between Norval on her left and Josephus on her right. The latter was preoccupied with Elberta, whom he had taken in, leaving Freddy to the uncertain attentions of Norval. He struck her as a particularly incorporeal and misty sort of ghost, in spite of his stocky body, and blunt face. Mastering a quite insane desire to ask him whether he could twitch his whiskers like a cat, she set her mind to the subject which she had studied up at the library for his special behoof. What was the technical term that she had planned to start with? Jennet? Hell, no! (This, of course, was purely mental; it is so difficult to control the profanity of the mind.) A jennet was a ladylike mule. Jesset; that was it. She was about to start something tactful on jessets when she became aware that Norval had already started something on his own account with his cousin across the table.

"They ought to be kept out," he was declaring.

"Who ought, Cousin Norval?" asked Freddy, breaking in with mild determination.

For the moment he seemed rather dismayed at the intrusion: did he expect her to sit through an entire dinner unregarded? Little did he know his new cousin, if

so! "The organizers," he answered. "The agitators, you know."

"What do they do?"

"Try to organize unions secretly among our men."

"Why secretly?"

"They know better than to show themselves in the mills."

"Oh! You don't allow them on the property?"

"Certainly not."

"Are conditions as bad as all that?"

Norval blinked. "Conditions? What conditions? I don't understand you."

"Your working conditions. I'd always understood that they were very good."

"They are," declared the other. "I wouldn't run my factory on any other basis. You won't find men anywhere better paid or treated than ours. We look after them if they're injured or sick, and more than once when business was bad we've run at a loss rather than shut down and throw our people out of work. That's been Cousin Augusta's principle, always. The mills are the Ruyland Mills, and the workers are the Ruyland people, and she'd no more allow them to be underpaid or ill-treated than she'd allow an animal belonging to her to be abused. What did you say?"

Freddy had said, beneath her breath "Benevolent despotism," but she did not deem it necessary to repeat it.

"Yet," he continued morosely, "these pestilent organizers sneak into town under the very noses of the police that we support with our taxes, and try to stir up trouble among the men. There's an anarchist named Borck who makes this his special stamping ground."

"I know Borck," said the girl.

"You know him? Not personally!"

"Yes. Why not? He's a very interesting man."

"An anarchist and a firebrand." Augusta Ruyland had been listening in and now gave her decree.

"You're quite mistaken," began Fredericka, and was cut short with a curt: "I'm never mistaken in my judgment of people."

Support came to the defender from a most unexpected quarter. "While I cannot agree with his theories," said the bishop suavely, "yet I find Mr. Borck an interesting and even stimulating character. I believe that he is not a destructionist, but quite the contrary."

"Your belief is wrong," said the hostess flatly. "He is a union organizer who would try to run our property if we gave him the chance. He will never get the chance."

Fredericka turned back to Norval. "Borck says that the difficult places to organize are mills like these where the people are so well treated that they are drugged, as he calls it, by fair play, decent working conditions, and good wages. Fattened animals, he calls them. He says that it's only grievances that bring in new unions. No grievance, no chance."

"They have no grievance here," asserted Norval.

"Except that you try to bar out the organizers."

"But you wouldn't have me let them in to do their underhand, undermining work."

The girl's eyes sparkled. "If I were running a mill here, do you know what I'd do?"

"Turn it over to the unions to run for you?"

"No. When Borck or any other organizer came to town I'd send around and invite him to come down to the plant. I'd take him through myself, or I'd let him go by himself and talk to the men all he wanted. Then when he was through I'd say to him: 'If you could unionize this place, what would you do for the men that we

haven't already done?' And when he held his meeting I'd expect him to invite me to it."

A faint color rose in his sallow cheek. "I thought at first you might be one of those parlor radicals. But I believe there's something in what you say."

"Of course there is. You're giving the organizer a grievance to work on when you practically tell your men that they mustn't listen to him."

"I believe you're right. By gravy! I wish I had you in my factory."

"Do you?" She dimpled at him. "I might come and hold conferences with you—I suppose you solemnly call 'em conferences here—once a week or so, and give you good advice which you wouldn't take."

"I'm not so sure I wouldn't."

"Then I'll give you some now. Talk to Mrs. Gallup on your other side. We mustn't monopolize each other."

"I'd rather talk to you," said he simply. "I'd rather talk to you than any one I know."

She laughed outright. "Good for the Grampian! Oh, I didn't mean to say that."

"They used to call me 'Grampian' in school. I haven't heard it since. I don't mind it. It's friendly, anyway."

"Yes, it's that," said she, a little touched. "It would be funny if we should become friends, wouldn't it? You didn't like me at first."

"I didn't notice you. I'm a dull sort of person, Cousin Fredericka. But you've given me something to think about. And I'd like to talk to you more about it. Would you come down and go through Factory Three some day? That's mine, you know."

"Of course. I'd love it." She lifted the glass which a silent and disembodied spirit had filled with champagne.

"To our better friendship," she said blithely. "Do you

know," she added, "I think Mrs. Ruyland suspects me of flirting with you." And to her extreme and mischievous delight, she saw the slow color rise again in his cheeks.

"Oh, no!" he protested heavily. "She would never think that."

"Anyway, we aren't doing our social duty. What are they all talking about now?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I haven't been paying any attention." He listened for a moment. "Oh, epitaphs, I believe."

"Epitaphs! How amusing! And how appropriate!"

He missed the insinuation. "Aunt Sara Ruyland is dying of old age," he explained. "Ninety-seven, going. And the family are always interested in mortuary inscriptions."

("They would be!" thought Freddy to herself.) A perverse desire to startle this stodgy but not wholly hopeless individual possessed her. "They ought to apply to me."

"Are you interested in the subject?"

"I'm interested in everything. *Everything*. Try to remember that about me, Cousin Norval. And I came across the most fascinating epitaph last week."

"Would it do for Aunt Sara?"

"Hardly that," she chuckled. "Listen and you can judge for yourself." In her grave and beautiful voice she recited, low-breathed, Victor Plarr's lines:

"Stand not, uttering sedately
 Trite, oblivious praise above her.
 Rather say you saw her lately
 Lightly kissing her last lover.
 Silence—since 'twould be a pity
 To o'erpraise her or to flout her:
 She was wild—and sweet—and witty—
 Let's not say dull things about her."

"She was wild—and sweet—and witty—" echoed the man next her, and there came a strange, strained expression into his face as of one awakening to a tardy realization of something irrevocably lost.

"Do you like it? I didn't think you would."

"It hurts," he said.

At that her face grew luminous and dreamy. "It's the kind of thing that might have been written for Mary Magdalen, if there'd been a poet there who knew her."

"There was," he asserted.

"Was there? Who?"

"The Christ."

"*What!*" From sheer amazement that this thing should have come from him, she laughed aloud.

He drew back, flushing painfully. "I didn't think you'd have laughed," he muttered.

Impulsively she touched his hand. "Oh, I'm sorry, sorry," she murmured. "It wasn't making fun. Indeed it wasn't. It was just because you were so—so right, and I was so surprised. You must believe me."

"I do." His commonplace face cleared. "I thought you'd understand."

"It's quite wonderful of you, though," she said, and became aware that the head of the table was regarding them with curiosity.

"What's happened to you, Norval?" acidly inquired Augusta Ruyland. "You look sheepish."

"Cousin Fredericka has been quoting poetry to him," said Elberta, with malice.

The tactful bishop (alas for kindly social intentions!) leaned forward. "Poetry? Ah, do let us all have the benefit of it."

"Oh, no; I don't think it would interest you," said Fredericka hastily.

"Let us be the judges of that," rasped the old lady.

"I hold myself quite as competent to pronounce upon poetry as Norval."

While she was speaking Fredericka said under her breath to Norval: "They wouldn't understand. I can't."

"And please do not whisper it," said the baleful voice of the despot. "Come. Perhaps if you are ashamed of it Norval will oblige us."

"Ashamed?" began Fredericka, her color already springing at the challenge, when Norval Ruyland rose to the stature of a hero, and, with an effort of memory which was no mean feat, repeated the whole poem with only one slight hesitation.

Freddy could have wept. Through the medium of that dull, mechanical voice none of the beauty of the lines percolated. It was cold and spiritless and a little gross. A dead silence followed the rendition. Then the old lady rose to her feet.

"We have had our obscenity in this room," she pronounced deliberately. "We will take our coffee outside where the air is still clean."

The dinner was over. The war was begun.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FORTHWITH floods of Ruylands descended socially upon Fredericka. It was more than an adoption into the family; it was an attempted absorption. While the wife of Kennion Ruyland was willing enough to be adopted, since it would so simplify life both for herself and, what was more important, for her husband; to be absorbed into a Nirvana of Ruylandism, with all that it implied in submergence of personality, was a prospect that revolted her young independence of spirit. Clipped wings! All of them, as she watched them in daily procession, seemed to flutter feebly and unrebellingly within walls not toweringly lofty, but too high for their cramped instincts of flight. All but Augusta Ruyland. She, at least, was "dangerously free o' the air" and, thinking of her in the impregnable power and pride of her central fastness, Fredericka's quick mind applied a memory of Scripture in a luminous and unintentionally punning phrase "haggards of The Rock." Such was Augusta Ruyland, a proud and hovering hawk above lesser broods, not like poor Norval's tamed and secret falcons.

Alone of the Ruylands, Norval in his shy manner had given her a clew to the easiest adjustment. "It's mostly a matter of appearances, Cousin Fredericka; the way things look. If you just adopt their ways in external things—"

"Like basket marketing and charity visits? But why 'their ways,' Norval? Why didn't you say 'our ways'?"

"I meant to." He blinked a bit, as if wondering what

his slip had really meant. "It isn't so hard to be a Ruyland, on the outside."

"It's pretty dowdy and stupid," stated Fredericka, who was feeling mutinous that morning.

"It would be to you." He sighed.

"Is it hard to be a Ruyland on the inside, then?"

"Not for me. I'm dowdy and stupid, you see."

"Now from any one else that would be a perfectly dumb bid for a denial. I'm not going to defend you against yourself. Anyway, I was thinking about my own self, as usual. Do you think it would be hard for me to be a Ruyland, inside as well as out?"

"Impossible. Don't try it."

"I've no intention of trying it. But why impossible?"

"You don't even like us."

"Guilty! As a whole, I certainly don't. I like *you*."

"Do you? I wonder why," said he wistfully.

"Oh, because you're kind and friendly and haven't ever had a fair chance and—and—" She broke impatiently through her own verbal gropings. "All that's bosh, you know," she declared. "We don't like people because of their pious qualities. We like 'em *because*, and that's all there is to it. You and I speak something like the same language, and where you don't understand me you never say stupid things. It began almost right away, and I think it's going to last."

"I know it is, for me."

"Well, don't be solemn about it. I get enough Ruyland solemnity from the others. More than I do of anything else except maybe—well, except expectancy."

"Expectancy? Of what?"

"What do you suppose?" she twinkled at him. "They're all in it; all that steady file of steady Ruylands that have been calling on me since the party at The

Rock certified me Grade A. Even the old maid twins: I think it's positively indelicate of 'em, don't you?"

His pained and half-averted flush confirmed her interpretation of the nature of the family expectancy. She laughed in his face.

"You've had it in mind too. And you blush so badly, Norval. Am I horrifying you?"

"N-n-no. I—certainly not."

"And you lie almost as badly as you blush. I don't care. Why should I pander to your silly conventionalities and keep off all kinds of grass that I consider it perfectly proper to walk on? And if my bold and brazen talk is too much for you, you can just pick up your skirts in one hand and your sunshade in the other and exit, shrieking, before your sense of propriety is hopelessly compromised. That's rather cool of me, though," she chuckled, "considering that it's your office. I'd forgotten that for the moment; shows how much at home I'm getting to feel here. Maybe *I'd* better do the departing shriek."

She had formed a semi-habit of dropping in at Factory Three on her way back from marketing, to "see the animal feed," as she termed it—Norval, who always reached his office at half past seven, preferring luncheon out of a beautifully inlaid box to club or restaurant fare. Perched on his desk, Fredericka would confer with him about the routine of the mill, in the human side of which she had specially interested herself or, more rarely, about the affairs of the family. This was a family day.

"No; don't do that, Cousin Fredericka," he said, forcing a determined smile. "Please go on with what you were saying."

"At your peril, then. They all want me to produce more Ruylands. As if there weren't enough of you!

Not that there are enough like Kennion," she modified loyally. "But how do I know my children would be like Kennion? They might cast back to some of his doubly double Ruyland ancestors. Anyway, what business is it of theirs, all these Ruyland women who come around hinting and insinuating and intruding on my most private affairs?" she demanded fiercely. "If I want to talk to you about it, that's all right. I suppose, though, that they'd think this conversation positively indecent, just as you're thinking it now"—she checked his protest with an imperative gesture—"and the Grandante more than any of 'em. Yet if you could have heard the things"—her vivid face flushed darkly—"she dared to ask me about under pretense of interest in the family! After one talk that she forced on me in my own house, I was so angry and disgusted and sick that I had to get out and breathe some air that wasn't Ruyland air. They talk about the freedom of morals and speech of the younger generation; we may talk frank and open generalities; but at least we're decent enough to respect other people's privacy."

"I'm not trying to excuse Aunt Augusta, but you must realize that, as the head of the family—"

"She'll never be the head of my family, if I have one," interrupted the young wife vehemently. She brooded for a moment. "Suppose I should have a baby, and suppose I died. Who'd get it to bring up? She would, wouldn't she?"

"Why, probably. She'd be the one Kennion would naturally turn to."

"Of course she would! Not for any baby of mine, thank you! Norval, do you hate her, too? Don't you hate her a little bit?" she coaxed.

"Hate Aunt Augusta?" He was visibly perturbed at the strange thought.

"Too much to expect of a Ruyland, isn't it? As a matter of fact, I only hate her part of the time myself. I'm too fair-minded; that's my trouble. I can see all her real qualities. But can she see mine? Or yours?"

"Of course she does."

"Don't you believe it. Not of me, anyway. She'll never have any use for me until she's succeeded in humbling me."

"How could she do that, even if she wanted to?"

"How should I know? She'll try. Wait and see. 'Breaking the child's obstinate spirit' was the phrase in your day, wasn't it? And it was supposed to be for the child's own good, instead of the breaker's satisfaction. 'Broken spirits to mend.' Somebody ought to put up a sign and do a rushing local business. Think I'll suggest it to that queer Selover man."

"How is his suit coming on, Cousin Fredericka?" asked Norval, relieved at the shift in the interest from a phase which he could not but consider morbid if not actually unworthy. But his hopefulness was promptly disappointed.

"It's coming fast. The sooner the better, say I. I want it over and done with. Never mind that. We're talking about the Grandante. Perhaps you couldn't bring yourself to hate her. But you're afraid of her. Aren't you?"

"Yes, I suppose I am," he admitted reluctantly.

"Good man! I'd rather you'd be afraid and own up squarely rather than—" She clicked sharp teeth together, for the end of that sentence would have been "—rather than deny it like Kennion." She shifted to, "What did she say to you about the dinner party?"

"Nothing. She never does."

"No. She just insults people and goes right on as if nothing had happened."

"She doesn't mean it as an insult. She's always prided herself on speaking her mind. It's the privilege of her place."

"If any one came back at her—"

He shook his head, plainly at a loss to conceive the results of so cataclysmic an occurrence. "I don't know what would happen."

"Some one will, some day. It'll be a better woman than I, perhaps. Not that I'm really afraid of her, except on Kennion's account. There it is, you see; she holds us all by some puppet wire of loyalty or love or interest."

"You mustn't mind her," pleaded Norval. "She's an old woman and has always had her way since she was a young one."

"Because she's the best man of you all. She catches you early and stakes you down and tames you before you know what's happened. Kennion almost got away from her. I believe you could have been the real man of the lot if you hadn't been tamed so young, Norval."

"I? Oh, no!" he murmured. "Not against Aunt Augusta."

"Oh, you make me tired," she burst out. "You ought to have married me and—" The expression that vivified while it darkened his dull face brought her up short. For once she lost her head. "I mean for your own sake," she blundered. "Oh, how dumb of me! What I'm trying to say is that you ought to have married outside the family, some one not obsessed with the Ruylands and Ruylandism. But the family held you, just as it's trying to hold Kennion; just as it's going to hold poor little Elberta unless I can save her."

He stared. "From marrying Josephus? Why should you?"

"Somebody's got to. She doesn't love him, nor he her, probably. Norval, I'm going to fight Aunt Augusta for that child's soul."

"She wasn't very friendly to you that night of the dinner party."

"We've had that all out. She hit out at me because she was unhappy. She doesn't know what to do. She told me she didn't want to marry Josephus, but she supposed she might as well, as everybody in the family expected her to. More family expectancy!" concluded Fredericka savagely. The next instant she was smiling at her own vehemence. "Have I spoiled the poor man's luncheon with my treasonable talk?" She slipped from the desk, catching up her gloves.

"Don't go yet. I hear that labor agitator from New York is coming here this fall."

"Christian Borck? We'll invite him to a meeting of our Factory Three Club."

"Would he come?"

"Certainly he'll come if I ask him."

"Suppose *she* should find it out."

"No supposition about it. Doesn't she find out everything?"

"Practically," he sighed. "She's strong enough against the club now, without any further reason."

"Hates it," agreed Fredericka blithely. "Because it's an innovation and she wasn't the one to think of it. How's it getting along?"

"Very well. The choral part of it is the thing to build around. That Gillis chap from Gumbelius's is helping a lot with the music."

"Fizzy Fritz? There's a character!"

"I can't abide him," declared the staid Norval.

"Why? He's really an engaging little soul in his play-

ful way. If ever there was the original life-of-the-party, he's it. At present I think he's casting the eye of the wistful sheep in the direction of Elberta."

Norval's chair creaked with the jerk of the bulky body. "That counterjumper!"

"He's a particular pet of the Grandante's, though."

"As a poodle might be. A kind of court jester. If any one ever mentioned him before her in the same breath with Elberta there would be—"

"Hell to pay," Fredericka cheerily finished for him. "Don't let the danger spoil your beauty sleep. It's just one of my little experiments with life. I've got 'em together in the one-act play we're putting on at the Ruyland Memorial Hospital benefit, and the Fizzy One, who would flirt with anything, is getting quite a thrill out of paying respectful attentions to one of the higher-ups. Oh, very respectful. Too darn respectful. I want Elberta to get a little man-conscious. It's part of my plot. Aren't you ever going to get over being scandalized at my harmless line of talk, Norval?" she inquired anxiously. "You do turn the most extraordinary and alarming colors on the smallest provocation. What on earth did your evil mind think I meant?"

"I don't believe I shall ever understand you, Cousin Fredericka," he averred in a failing voice.

"I should hope not! Half my pull and nine-tenths of my charm would be lost," she returned impudently. "By man-conscious, my little pupil, I mean that she has never thought about men in their possibilities as—well, as forms of intellectual and spiritual entertainment for us dull and bored women. She's afraid of the harmless things, Norval; hasn't any confidence in herself where they are concerned. Doesn't understand what can be done with 'em by a little management, and if she marries

that estimable lump of mud, Josephus, she never will. Well, it's my business just now to see that if she does marry him, she at least gets a little gleam of life first."

"From that cheap little store clerk?" inquired Norval with distaste.

"He isn't a store clerk. He's a proud and lofty general factotum and floor manager to an emporium or something impressive like that. Anyway, he's only a starter for Elberta; infant-class stuff. Know a young man named Ransome Case?"

"The one whose cleansing process is being tried out at Number Two?"

"He's the man. Butler in my play. He's made the astonishing and vital discovery that Elberta is pretty, but she hasn't yet discovered that he's discovered it."

"She isn't," pronounced Norval, his eyes fixed upon the face of the speaker.

"Isn't she! Wait till you see her in full war paint. If there isn't a popular gasp when she comes on I'll ring down the curtain. I really gave her the part to show her, through the eyes of others, what she could be. Oh, I'm a deep one, my Grampian cousin! Look out for me. Heavens! You keep me chattering here till luncheon time, and Elberta waiting for me since noon. I'll be in again in a day or two, to stir up trouble in Factory Three for you."

Her first words to Elberta upon entering the house were: "Don't, for the love of Mike, slouch. How many more times have I got to tell you?"

"Can't you ever let me rest?" complained the girl. "This isn't a rehearsal."

"It is. Everything's a rehearsal for you till I get you trained."

"You can't do anything with me," gloomed Elberta.

"I'm so tired and bored with it all. And I don't get anywhere."

"Don't you, though! I suppose you don't know that young Gillis is crazy over you."

Despite her conscientious attempt to look socially contemptuous, the girl's violet eyes sparkled.

"Doesn't he do a sprint and fall all over himself every time you come into the store now?" pursued the encourager.

"I wish he wouldn't. Yesterday I was sure Aunt Augusta was going to notice it."

"Not she. He's been her *cavaliere servente* too long; she'd think it was all for herself. Berta, I wish you'd flirt with him a little more. It would be *so* good for your sweet young soul!"

"I—I don't know how."

"And yet the creature has the outward appearance of a woman!" despaired Fredericka. "Haven't you ever had a love affair in your life?"

"Oh, yes! He was an awfully nice boy. But the year he graduated from grammar school—"

"Stop right there. How long ago was this? How old were you?"

"Let—me—see; ten or eleven. And Claude was—"

"Never mind Claude. Is that the best you can do in the line of guilty reminiscence?"

The fretful tone came back into Elberta's voice. "I never feel at ease with men, unless it's some one I've always known, like Josephus. And they don't take any interest in me."

"Because you never give 'em a chance. Berta, have you ever been kissed?"

"Not since that boy I told you—"

"Oh, *Lord!*"

"Have you? Except Kennion, I mean."

Fredericka stared. "Are you serious?"

"Of course."

"Look at me, girl. Do I look quite a fright?"

"I think you're lovely."

"No, I'm not. But I'm no gargoyle. And if you've any idea that a girl under normal conditions who isn't positively injurious to the eyes to look at, reaches the age of twenty-four without having been kissed occasionally, then you've spent your life between the covers of the Ruyland family photograph album and it's time you came out."

"I'm nearly twenty-two," murmured the girl.

"A misspent life!"

"But that kind of thing is so—so *common*."

Again the older girl stared. "Do you think I'm advising you to go necking around with the first comer, like Gillis, for instance?"

"What are you advising me?"

Fredericka dropped her chin into her cupped hand, her peculiar pose of rumination. "Well, what *am* I? Just to get yourself some little experience of life, I expect, before you hitch yourself to a Ruyland post, if you must hitch. At least I'd like to see you make yourself attractive enough so that men would want to kiss you. The rest is up to you."

"If I had what you have!"

"Oh, rats! Bald and inelegant rats! You've got all you need. You've got eyes that could do wholesale murder if you'd use 'em, and there's a little, downy hollow in your upper lip that's full of all kinds of trouble. That eyebrow lift that I've succeeded in making you cultivate is getting quite natural to you, isn't it? Because you're beginning to inquire into life and be curious. There will be plenty to try and find the answer to that question for you, before all's said and done: that's my

prophecy. You don't suppose, do you, that somewhere in your maidenly make-up you've got concealed a dash of that charming old reprobate, Grandfather Americus?"

"Once in a great while," confessed the girl in a hopeful half whisper, "I feel almost reckless."

"Wonderful!" applauded Fredericka. "Maybe the old rip's blood has skipped a generation. I'm going to try you out at my tea, Friday. You're to help pour. And I think I'll just make you up a little bit for the occasion."

"What if Aunt Augusta should—"

"Nobody ever says 'Aunt Augusta' to me without a what-if before her. You forget Aunt Augusta and concentrate on my tea. It's going to be something new in Ruyland entertainments. The whole cast of the play will be invited, and some of the Factory Three Choral."

"As mixed as that!"

"Isn't it time we got mixed a bit? Anything duller than the ordinary Ruyland show would bore a corpse at his own funeral. Those that don't like my experiment needn't come again. And if you don't flirt at least a little, *you* needn't come again."

The Kennion Ruylands' tea was a popular occasion. As a rule, Ruyland men did not attend daytime events; the day was, traditionally, hallowed to business. But tradition was broadly infringed this time. Kennion naturally attended, and rallied to him some of the younger element of the mills such as Ransome Case and Josephus. The latter would have been there in any event, since it was deemed fitting that he should exhibit assiduity as regards Elberta. But there was general surprise amounting almost to consternation when Norval appeared, emboxed in a freshly pressed frock coat of characterless irreproachability—a surprise not shared by the hostess, since she had announced to her loyal ally that she ex-

pected his presence and support. Except for an incapacitated few, every Ruyland woman in town was present out of curiosity, for Augusta Ruyland had let it be known that she was not feeling particularly well—that marvel of nerveless stamina!—and might not be able to come. If she did not, it would be interpreted in the light of a snub, though not of a complete social disavowal. If she did, there might or might not be interesting events, as usually was the case when the Grandante purposefully attended any function.

Dawley Cole arrived after proceedings were well under way. A discreet surge of femininity advanced to meet him, suppressing as best it might its eagerness. Was he the advance courier of Greatness? Or had he come merely to report? The smiling little man was noncommittal: had not seen Mrs. Ruyland that day; understood that she had been affected with a slight headache, but was better, which left the situation open to any conjecture. The amiable private reporter paid his homage to the hostess, told Elberta, without specially observing her, how well she was looking, then took a casual glance and repeated his compliment with a fervor which would have been more flattering had it not been obviously mingled with amazement.

Little it mattered to the violet-eyed maiden. Fritz Gillis, more elegantly garbed than any Ruyland of them all, was playing the obsequious slave to her, while a dark, obstinate-looking young man with an early Puritan profile, relieved by a cheerful smile, seemed to be anchored at her elbow.

Mr. Cole inquired of Josephus, circulating vaguely about the rooms, who that was, and was informed that it was Ransome Case. Mrs. Ruyland's private reporter made a private note and proceeded upon further quiet inquests regarding other people unknown to him. Many

such were in the room, more than he had ever seen at a Habersham social event before; queer-looking people, some of them decidedly out of place, he thought. Both professionally and personally Mr. Cole prepared to make the most of his opportunities.

Concerned chiefly for her non-Ruyland guests, Fredericka was a busy and, though no one suspected it, an anxious hostess. The mill workers of the Choral were shy and showed a tendency to huddle. Mr. Gillis, at his frizziest, was contributing doubtfully to the general good by offering to perform parlor magic of a superior and cultural variety for Elberta and any one else she might name. Kennion's natural tact was not enough of itself to act as a general solvent, and Norval, with all the best intentions that loyalty could inspire, did nothing but spread uneasiness before him and leave dullness in his wake. Fredericka's party bade fair to separate into unassimilable groups, when there was a flutter at the door, a hush over the room, a murmur as indicative as a flourish of trumpets.

Enter the Grandante.

Defects and deficiencies Augusta Ruyland might have, but she was not in herself dull, and she was a potent exorcist of dullness in others. Her greeting to Fredericka was formal, but impeccably courteous. She accepted from the hurrying and obsequious Gillis a cup of tea and a crumpet, then looked about her with a slow, comprehensive survey. Fredericka, at tension, waited for the first comment which should indicate her intentions toward the factory folk. If, as her hostess quite expected, she made things unpleasant or embarrassing for them, Fredericka was fully resolved (which she afterward explained to Kennion) to jump down her throat and kick her to death from inside. The comment was not long delayed.

"Really quite a crush. I didn't know you had such a wide range of friends."

"One never knows who one's own friends are," fenced the hostess, "let alone knowing about some one else's."

"I know who mine are," declared the old lady with conviction, "and there seem to be a lot of 'em here." She put up her lorgnette. "*Is that Norval Ruyland, inside the extraordinary garment that looks like a lead coffin? Norval! Norval Ruyland!*"

The Grampian came lumbering across the floor, looking schoolboyish. "How-do, Aunt Augusta."

"Is Factory Three closed to-day?" she demanded, fixing him with an uncompromising eye.

"No, Aunt Augusta, but—"

"You ought to feel greatly flattered," said the grim old lady, turning to Fredericka, "at getting a business machine like Norval away from his desk in hours. How did you do it?"

"Oh, Norval and I are pals," returned Fredericka airily, and was pleased to note that the old lady didn't like it. "We've got all sorts of schemes going. The Choral is only one of 'em. You've heard about that?"

"All I want to. Are those your singing friends, looking guilty in that corner?"

Fredericka flushed, annoyed. All that was protective in her instinct of hospitality rose and bristled as Mrs. Ruyland walked deliberately over to the group. She strained her ears for what was coming. The clear old voice floated back to her distinct above the general murmur.

"Well! There's Sam Coleson. And Ben Ainsworth. Didn't know you were a songbird, Ben. Sam, did you get that last chess problem I sent you? . . . No?" She chuckled. "Well, I did. . . . Margaret, that boy of yours ought to have his foot looked after again. I no-

ticed him limping yesterday. . . . What are you folks planning for the municipal picnic this year?"

As if by a transfusion of spirit, the whole body of the group was straightway vitalized. The old lady was the center of a crowd, chattering, gossiping, bantering in a give-and-take in which she was all wit and alertness and friendliness without for an instant compromising her dignity. From that inspirited center the quickened meter spread to other groups; the whole atmosphere was magically electrified; without evident transition, everybody began to be sprightly and have a good time, the old lady seeming to have, and perhaps actually having, the best time of all. Fredericka's party was saved.

"How does she do it?" she whispered to Kennion. "She'd never dream of having these people at The Rock—"

"Indeed she would, and does. Twice a year, at a special party."

"Oh, yes; special. That's different. She doesn't mix 'em. Yet here she's right with 'em every minute, and me shivering in my little shimmy for fear she was going to make some ghastly break that would ruin the whole show."

"Not the Grandante. They're her people, and she's just as loyal to them as she would be to you or me."

"She's a wonder!" sighed Fredericka.

Impossible not to like the Grandante at her best.

Three-fourths of the guests had gone when Mrs. Ruyland made her way back to the central tea table where Fredericka was talking with Norval. "Your tea has been a venture and a success," she pronounced grandly.

"Thanks to you, the success," returned the hostess. "It was headed for the discard when you arrived and pulled things together."

"How could you be expected to understand our peo-

ple?" patronized the old lady. "They're not your kind. And," she supplemented, "I advise you not to try to be their kind. They'd hardly appreciate it. Where's Elberta?"

"I saw her headed toward the garden a while back."

"With Josephus?"

"Josephus had left."

"Alone, then?" asked the Grandante sharply.

"No. She was with Mr. Case."

A frown wrinkled the high forehead. "Send for her at once, if you please. I wish to see her."

Fredericka bit her lip, hesitated. The request was far too much in the tone of a command to rest kindly on her impatient spirit. But she called a maid and sent her after the errant Elberta.

"Your garden seems to be doing unusually well this summer," remarked Mrs. Ruyland, looking around at the profusion of flowers.

"It isn't. Those aren't from our garden. Cousin Selah sent them."

The other's eyebrows went up. Selah B. Ruyland was the hermit of the clan who, on his hillock outside the city, devoted himself to his gardens and greenhouses.

"You have made a conquest, indeed! Selah has never been known to distribute his treasures except to hospitals and exhibitions."

"I invited him this afternoon, and he responded with a truckload of flowers instead of coming. He's an old dear. Oh, no," she reverted, "the garden here is a disappointment. I don't suppose it's ever had a fair chance. The ground must have been chilled with neglect."

"Don't be silly and sentimental. Manure," said the downright old lady. "That's all it needs."

Fredericka shook her head. "It needs something it's never had from the people who ought to have cared for

it. Nobody's ever loved it, poor thing! Gardens are sort of human, you know. You've got to love them if you expect much of them. I miss my flowers; there used to be such lots of them." She hesitated, remembering with one of those sentimental regrets which even the most faithful of wives sometimes permit themselves the source of some of the flowers of her past. "If I could have my way, my bedroom would have roses in it all the time, new ones as fast as the old ones dropped. Big, rich, luscious, deep-red roses!"

"Very bad to sleep in the room with heavy-perfumed flowers," stated the oracle. "Kennion could never stand it, I'm sure. It would bring on one of his headaches."

"Well, he needn't have 'em in his room," said the young wife, unthinkingly.

The old lady was upon her with a pounce. "His room! Your room! Do you mean to tell me you have separate rooms?" She sat up with a snap like a knife blade.

Fredericka flushed. She hadn't meant to tell her anything; it was none of her affair, but— She became aware of Norval beating a painful retreat as he muttered something about finding Elberta. "Why not?" she said. "We're separate people. I mean, we're two individuals, after all."

"Am I to understand that you are leading separate lives?" The voice was ominous.

"I don't know that it's necessary that you understand anything about it," she retorted coldly. "But we certainly are not leading separate lives."

"Perhaps I'm too old-fashioned to understand your very modern ways, but I have my own ideas about these things. Shall I tell you what I think, Fredericka Ruyland?"

Fredericka stood up. "No. Better not."

She bridled. "I'm not in the habit of being silenced in matters that concern my family—"

"This is a matter that concerns Kennion and me alone," broke in the young wife. "If you insist on talking about it, talk to Kennion."

"What's it all about?" inquired that amiable person, lounging in from the hallway. "Did I hear my name mentioned in tones of affection and respect by one or more charming ladies?"

"Mrs. Ruyland wants to find Elberta before she goes, Kennion," said his wife quietly.

The old lady smiled; it was the smile of a game combatant recognizing sound technique in her adversary. "Very good, my dear." The approval was clear and crisp. "But I'm not going just yet, if you don't mind. As for Elberta, my guess is that she might be on that upstairs porch of yours. And by the way, Kennion, I've never seen your rooms—yours and Fredericka's—since they were done over. Won't you show them to me?"

"I don't think they're in very good order," put in Fredericka, trying to catch her husband's eye; but he, with true masculine incapacity to appreciate the finesse of feminine warfare, said readily: "Oh, that wouldn't make any difference. Come on, Aunt Augusta."

A glow of triumph was in the old lady's eye as she swept past her helpless hostess. Impossible not to hate the Grandante at her worst!

Simmering with inner wrath, Fredericka officiated as best she could over the slow departure of the remaining guests. Elberta came in late, not from the garden but from the recesses of Kennion's study, with Ransome Case following.

"Look out for the old demon," Fredericka warned her. "She's on your trail."

Elberta was flushed and conscious, but there was a new light in her eye as she returned: "I don't care a whoop if she is."

"Well, don't bite *me*," said the other, with amused satisfaction. "Run along home with Mr. Case. The show's over, and the animals gone—all but the worst," she added with malign intent.

As they went, Kennion reappeared. "Where's your Aunt Augusta?" was the instant challenge he met with.

"Oh, I left her up there. She didn't need me," he replied easily.

"Kennion! You left her in our rooms, alone?" Never before had the young husband heard that tone in his wife's voice.

"Well, why not?" His own manner would have placated a raging lioness. It did not placate his wife.

"Why not? Don't you know that she'll be poking and peering and prying around into every little detail of—of everything?"

Kennion was frankly puzzled. "Well, what if she does? And why should she?"

"Because of her rotten, poisonous, impudent curiosity. Oh, I could beat you! Go and get her at once."

For once Kennion, the easy-humored, turned sulky. "I certainly am not going to turn my aunt out of my own house. If you want that done, you'll have to do it yourself."

"Of course you wouldn't understand," she cried despairingly. "Never mind, then. But at least please do go and see what she's doing."

But the Grandante was not so easily to be found. It was some twenty minutes later that Fredericka, making a final round-up, heard from a bow-window off the side hall, voices raised in hot disputation: "You talk like a fool, Sam Coleson! Your two last moves—"

"Nobody but a woman would try the pawn advance when—"

"Can't the idiot see that by interposing the knight—"

"What *are* you doing?" Fredericka's astonished query brought two absorbed faces up on opposite sides of a chessboard.

"For God's sake go away!" exploded Mrs. Ruyland. "Can't a body have a little peace in this house?" After her hostess's dignified and indignant retirement she shouted a request in the most amiably apologetic of tones: "Couldn't you keep us to supper, Fredericka? I'll have him soundly licked in fifteen minutes."

Impossible, it appeared, either to like or to hate the Grandante consistently for more than a short time at a stretch.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"SELOVER vs. Ruyland; a Suit to Recover Damages for Injuries Inflicted, etc., etc."

Ruylands were everywhere in the courtroom. In pairs they sat, in families, in solid blocks. The clan spirit was immanent in the atmosphere. A Ruyland was under fire, a Ruyland lawyer was defending her, there would be Ruyland witnesses; it behooved all proper Ruylands, whatever their diverse private opinions of the defendant, to stand by her to the last member against Philistine onslaught. Special interest was added by an untraceable rumor of strange testimony to be brought out. Discreetly curious looks were directed toward Fredericka Ruyland, who was divided between amusement at the rampant propagandism of this support and a feeling of grateful kinship evoked by it. Augusta Ruyland, upon entering, had made a point of coming over to speak to her with such lingering *empressement* that Fredericka was forcibly reminded of the courtroom scene in "Pickwick."

The plaintiff's lawyer might almost have emerged from the pages of that classic. James J. Branston was a paunchy, rubicund, middle-aged man whose face, sagging into quaint, wrinkly parallels with his waistcoat, was lighted by the most softly luminous brown eyes she had ever seen outside the possession of a dog. As a professional asset these emotional orbs were second only to his breaking voice and his insinuatingly paternal manner. Around him were grouped the four little playmates of Dorothea Selover who had been with her on the day

of the accident, and Dorothea herself. From time to time in the proceedings Branston would turn to smile touchingly at one or to pat another on the cheek with protective encouragement.

The jury was favorably impressed. It was his well-deliberated scheme to build up the picture of the accident through the simple presentation of the child group, adding for the final touch the reluctant and therefore the more effective testimony of Augusta Ruyland to the criminal carelessness of the defendant. Unless developments rendered it imperative, he did not intend to call the little victim to the stand, for Dorothea, strangely changed and matured since the hospital experiment, though docile under his patient coaching, had lately evinced a tendency to put disconcerting questions. Safer, perhaps, to leave her out of it on the pretense that the shock had impaired her temporary memory. Meantime he had a surprise in store which, he felt sure, would be unpleasant as well as unforeseen to the other side.

Fredericka had listened with rising disgust to the four little witnesses recite, one after the other, their four little, innocent, carefully drilled perjuries as to the inordinate speed of the car, the lack of signal, the reckless inattention of the driver, the helpless plight of the little girl trapped, through no fault of her own, in the path of the speeding juggernaut, and the tardiness with which the car had come to a stop afterward. It was a truly notable exhibition in the virtuosity of expert coaching. Lawyer Branston, having dismissed the last one with a smile which was like a blessing, sighed, directed a melting glance at the jury box and called, "Fredericka Ruyland."

A startled query from Fredericka to her counsel, Otis Ruyland, a bewildered confirmation from him of the opposition's right to call her as their witness, and she

had taken the stand and the oath. After a few formal questions the attack developed in full brunt.

"Have you had former accidents while driving motor cars, Mrs. Ruyland?"

An objection, promptly entered and hotly pressed, was overruled. What followed was under continual cross fire of argument and exceptions. The judge, who happened to have political ambitions and was therefore afraid of the suspicion of favoring the rulers of Habersham, admitted practically everything.

"Yes," answered Fredericka to the repeated question.

Branston consulted his notes. "One on Long Island two years ago?"

"Yes."

"Another in the same year, in New Jersey?"

"Yes."

"About a year later did you run down a farm wagon in Rockland County and settle with the farmer afterward for a broken leg and other injuries?" (Three of the jurors were farmers.)

"I believe our lawyers made some settlement. The man came out of a blind side road—"

"No; no! I'm not asking you that. Kindly answer my questions without comment. Were you ever arrested for speeding?"

Fredericka's breath caught. She knew now what she had to expect. But her reply was clear and prompt. "Yes."

"On the Boston Turnpike in July of last year, was it not?"

"It was."

"What time of day was it?"

"Between four and five."

"A.M. or P.M.?"

"A.M." A rustle passed through the massed Ruylands.

"Between four and five o'clock in the morning. Where had you been?"

"To the Mitrailleuse Inn to supper."

"Is that the same Mitray—excuse me, but I can't pronounce that word as well as you do. Is that the inn that was raided as a disorderly resort?"

When the interpolated objection was sustained, Lawyer Branston's soft eyes besought the jury to witness that he was doing his best for his client against oppressive opposition. He proceeded with a special suavity:

"You will pardon my insistence. Only my professional duty induces me to press questions which, I assure you, Mrs. Ruyland, are as painful to me as they must be to you. I—er—have a daughter myself, Mrs. Ruyland, of about your age, though unfortunately without your advantage of bringing up. Had you been at this inn with the French name all night?"

"I had been there since about one o'clock."

"Since about one," he repeated slowly. "Er—alone?"

"No; I was with—"

His swiftly raised hand and voice stopped her. "Wait, please. You have answered. It is not necessary for you to implicate others."

"How dare you speak of implicating?" cried Fredericka, for the first time breaking over her restraint. "As if something disgraceful—"

Lawyer Branston's gentle gaze now invoked the protection of the court. "I must beg the witness not to be unruly. Since, however, she evidently desires to enlarge upon her answer, I will give her every fair opportunity to set herself right. Mrs. Ruyland, was there any other lady present on this occasion?"

Fredericka bit her lip. "No; but—"

He was after her with a pounce: "Had you been drinking?"

There was another check for argument. In that brief respite Fredericka's brain became as a photographic plate. She saw Kennion wearing a look of futile incomprehension such as, she imagined, a soldier might show when after the shock and stupor he looked down to find his arm no longer there; she read his sick effort to realize that this thing could be happening publicly to his wife, to the woman he had made a Ruyland.

Elberta's violet gaze was fixed upon her, imploring her—what? To lie? In order to save herself? Or Kennion? Or the family? In a far corner the old-maid twins were engaged in exhibiting virginal shock.

Then she met Norval's look, and her heart warmed. The dull and stodgy man of business was swollen with murderous wrath; at any moment he might spring up and rush at the inquisitor. She gave him a little smile and nod and dissuading, reassuring gesture and let her look pass on to cross the hard satisfaction of Augusta Ruyland's stare. Some subtle and hostile rapport between the two minds flashed an intuition to the girl. It was confirmed when she noted, sitting next to the mistress of The Rock, her familiar, Dawley Cole. The little man's face was fiery with distress and with what she read as contrition.

So that was it! Those two had known all the time, had perhaps been the instruments, passive if not active, of the ordeal forced upon her. Through her soul there passed, like a dispelling wind, the chill of a grim determination. She was ready to meet the issue now and carry it on afterward. Whatever evil semblance might be lent to it by adroit legal perversions, she had done nothing which all the world might not have witnessed and known. The truth, without hesitancy or shame; that was her plan. Branston's question was repeated clear, in a complete hush:

"Had you been drinking?"

"Yes."

A breath of exultant dismay sighed through the air, the unanimous exhalation of the embattled Ruylands. Any Ruyland, man or woman, might drink in moderation—that moderation which was the keynote of Ruyland behavior and Ruyland character—but for a Ruyland woman to be forced to the admission, publicly and officially, that she had "been drinking" in dubious surroundings and unspecified companionship—that was corroding tarnish upon the pure metal of the name and record. Compensatory satisfaction was to be enjoyed in the thought that this unassimilated recruit was thus painfully learning what was expected of one who bore the name.

Color rose in the young cheeks of the witness on the stand. Her eyes, steady and controlled, were fixed somewhere above the lawyer's head. Only the Grampian, watchful in all that concerned her, perceived that she was holding Augusta Ruyland in the stricture of that unwavering look, and continued so to hold her throughout, and that Augusta Ruyland was withstanding that innate challenge and accusation, not without effort. What might it all portend? . . .

Branston resumed: "How many drinks had you had?"

"I don't know. I didn't count them."

"More than one?"

"Yes."

"Three?"

"Probably."

"Six?"

"Possibly, during the three hours."

"Well, ten?"

"No."

"Were you intoxicated?"

"I was not."

This time the breath of all the Ruylands sounded relief. So much, at least, had been spared them!

"Is the jury to understand that you were so much in the habit of taking six or more drinks that such an amount did not affect you at all?"

"I didn't say that they didn't affect me. I said that I was not intoxicated."

"Were you convicted of reckless driving on that occasion?"

"Yes."

"And served a jail term?"

"Yes. One day, technically."

"That is all," said Branston unexpectedly.

Recess followed on the brief and futile cross-examination. In the bustle of the break-up, Fredericka was aware of various Ruylands uncomfortably hovering, hardly knowing what line to take now, and obviously keeping an eye upon Mrs. Ruyland, hopeful of a clew. The Grandante sat in her chair with an effect of absolute, implanted immovability. Above her bent Kennion, deep in talk.

Anxiously Fredericka tried to catch her husband's eye. His face was uninterpretably filmed over, but she knew that he was suffering and wanted him to come to her. Once she motioned to him with a quick little summoning lift of the chin, a private gesture reminiscent of their brief and vivid courtship days. He paid no heed. Had he even seen her? She could not tell. But the realization invaded her mind that never before had he seemed so much a Ruyland and so little his exotic and charmed self. A slow bitterness welled up within her; she caught herself wondering—

Interruption; Norval and Elberta at her elbow, eager

to assure her of their wrathful adherence, having cut across the current of the crowd. When the trio moved toward the door, Augusta Ruyland had already preceded them, and Kennion had left her, but had not come back for Fredericka. In the outer hallway she heard the full, cold voice of the old lady in contemptuous disallowance: "I am not interested in your escapades, young man."

Then another voice of unforgotten timbre, deep, hot, and boyishly wrathful: "But, I tell you, Mrs. Delacour was with us on the party until—"

"Will you be good enough to stand out of my way?"

Fredericka darted forward. "Bobby!" she cried. "Oh, Bobby; I *am* glad to see you!"

A queer sort of shock passed over Robert Enderby's face as he turned and took the outstretched hands. His eyes were hungry upon her. But all that he said was: "Freddy, how are you?"

She twinkled with irrepressible, irresponsible gladness. "Ruined in reputation, but otherwise top-hole."

"I'm going to slay that reptile of a shyster lawyer," he promised, "as soon as I can find him." He interpreted the smiling shake of her head. "Mayn't I beat him up? Just a little?" he pleaded.

"Certainly not. What brings you to Habersham?"

"Business with the mills."

"Our mills?"

"Are there any other mills in the town but the Ruyland mills? Or anything else that isn't Ruyland?"

"You aren't. That's one reason I'm so glad to see you."

"What ho! But you went and married one of the darn things," he said with Enderbyish directness.

"Oh, Kennion's different," she answered hastily. "He

isn't much of a Ruyland. At least, I don't—" She broke off. "I want you to meet Kennion, Bobby. But you have met, haven't you?"

"I seem to discern through an alcoholic mist, something about him and a sketch on a menu card."

"Yes. That night in the Park when we all shook the party. What are you doing right now, Bobby?"

"Nothing in particular except hollowly hoping for food."

"Come home and lunch. Li'l' cocktail to help along?"

"Lunch, yes. Cocktail, no. I'm a ruined—that is to say, reformed—character."

Fredericka looked him over with kindly appraisal. "I do believe you are. You look—solidified. As if you were standing square on your feet instead of wobbling. What caused the earthquake?"

"Disappointment in love," he answered lightly. "Sometimes it sours the milk, and then again sometimes you get fresh butter."

"Good business. Who's the girl?"

"Same old girl."

With four fingers Fredericka made the sign of a barred gate. "*Rue barré*. Stop it, Bob. Or I won't take you to luncheon."

"Promised and sworn to. But you asked me. So I told you. I'm still privileged to obey the royal commands, ain't I? That isn't much to allow a fellow." He scanned her up and down. "You look marvelous," he decided. "Still wearing the old colors, too." He touched lightly a velvet-soft rose, glowing crimson at her waist. "He understands your taste in flowers, anyway."

"No," she denied. "You're the only one that ever pampered my hunch for that special hue. Anyway, a busy housewife hasn't time for such idle vanities." With folded hands she drooped her eyes in a parody of ultra-

meekness. "The humble but nutritious carrot is more in my line now. As a matter of fact, I bought that rose myself on my way to court just to put me in countenance as—well, as Freddy Gage again. D'you understand that, Bob?"

"Of course."

"You would," she agreed. "It was a little bit as a defi, too."

"Defiance was always one of the most obvious of your traits," he smiled. "Is it still?"

"It's got to be," she answered, more to herself than to him.

They emerged from the courthouse door, and Norval Ruyland stepped forward. Beyond him a few paces stood Lawyer James J. Branston, a mangled and lifeless cigar in his mouth, talking to a hanger-on.

"Waiting for me, Norval?" asked the girl. She hooked her arm into his. "Bob, this is my special, pet cousin, Norval Ruyland; Mr. Enderby. Bob was on that disastrous party that has just ruined me in the eyes of pious and well-conducted Habersham. I wore red roses that night too, if you remember."

Young Mr. Enderby remembered, but deemed it unessential to state how vivid that memory was.

"I think I'll always wear 'em from now on," she continued, "if Cousin Selah B. will kindly present his conservatory to me; just to flaunt 'em as a badge of shamelessness, though nobody'll appreciate 'em as that but you. Are you coming again?"

"To the trial? I certainly am, if you don't mind."

"Mind? I need you. As moral support if things get rough."

"I'm your little life preserver." The words were lighter than the speaker's expression.

She regarded him thoughtfully. "It's funny, Bobby,

but I do get a feeling of moral support from you that I never got before. Do you suppose the water-wagon is responsible? . . . What's wrong with Norval? He looks as if he were going to bite somebody."

From behind her Lawyer Branston made a dignified approach. "Pardon me, Mrs. Ruyland," he began in an unctuous voice, rubbing the back of one hand with the plump palm of the other. "I wish to assure you that however necessary my professional conscience—"

He stopped, at a loss. The slight young man in the smart homespun suit had quietly shouldered him off. It was more insulting and therefore more effective than a blow across the face would have been, merely from its negligent finality. Lawyer Branston temporarily lost his half-eaten cigar by muttering something which might have been a threat, oath, or apology; nobody knew and nobody cared. He withdrew. Fredericka shot a grateful glance at Enderby.

"I waited to tell you, Cousin Fredericka," said the Grampian, "that Kennion is lunching at The Rock to-day."

"I see. And I was to join him there?"

Norval colored up uncomfortably. "I—I don't know. There was nothing said. I suppose, of course—"

"Oh," said Fredericka Ruyland.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

HABERSHAM surged at the courtroom door at the afternoon session. Who could tell what might come next, after the sensational events of the morning? Two newspaper reporters from Boston were arriving, it was rumored, and even one from New York. A *cause célèbre*! Few but Ruylands and their adherents gained the coveted access, because when the clan had been suitably disposed, there was scant room for outsiders. Fredericka entered a little late, the crimson rose fresh and vivid at her waist. By drooping it would have conformed better to the notion of fitness entertained by the Ruylands. It was considered (after much confabulation) that Fredericka carried her disgrace too flauntingly. A sturdy pride in adverse circumstances was proper to a Ruyland. *But—*

The air quivered with anticipation as Augusta Ruyland took the stand to open the session. Witness for the plaintiff! Every Ruyland in that room knew what she had said at the time of the accident and repeated at intervals thereafter; that if the child died, that painted girl ought to be hanged for murder; that criminal recklessness like hers was what made the roads unsafe for decent, sober-going folks; that the girl had been paying no heed to where she was steering when the child was struck; that the child was careful enough, but could not have got out of the way of the improperly controlled car; the fault was solely and entirely the driver's. And now that deadly testimony was to be turned against the wife of the Grandante's cherished nephew. A Ruyland

bearing true witness against a Ruyland! Could such things occur in a world ordered and ruled by a divine and presumably Ruyland-respecting providence?

Augusta Ruyland was on the stand. Her gloved hand was raised to Heaven; her firm lips had kissed the air at a careful distance from the shabby Bible; she had sworn before the Maker of Ruylands and the rest of the universe to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And then, in a calm and dispassionate voice, she stated that she had closely noted every detail of the accident; that the defendant had used all proper and necessary caution; that her attention had been concentrated upon the road before her; that the car was hardly moving when it struck the child, who had run directly and blindly under the wheels, and that this was all true, so help her God. Lawyer Branston, first appalled and then furious, lost his head. His doglike brown eyes suffused with sparks. He forgot, to the pious horror of that assemblage, to whom he was speaking, and shook a savage finger at her, roaring: "Didn't you tell Daniel Selover before witnesses that if justice was done the defendant ought to be in jail?"

"Is my brother at the bar attempting to impugn his own witness?" inquired Otis Ruyland with caustic gentleness.

Lawyer Branston wilted. His case was crippled. The assembled clan exulted among themselves.

Augusta Ruyland had perjured herself like a lady.

"Would any one else like to ask me any questions?" she inquired courteously and, receiving a polite negative, descended, clothed in the majesty of a good deed well performed. One glance she gave to Fredericka, a glance of triumphant and hateful magnanimity, a glance which said: "I have saved you because, in spite of your iniquities, you are a Ruyland."

As she resumed her seat, Dawley Cole, rising, pressed her hand worshipfully.

"Magnificent!" he whispered.

The Grandante smiled. She felt that it was, in truth, none too strong a word.

Swift collapse followed for the Selover cause. Something had to be done to bolster up the case thus undermined; desperate, Lawyer Branston called Dorothea Selover to the stand.

"What a lovely child!" murmured Fredericka to Norval at her elbow. The plaintiff mounted the steps. "It isn't a child any longer, though," she corrected herself. "It's a grown girl. Did you ever see such wistful eyes?"

The change that had come over Dorrie Selover in those few short months was evidenced in more than her expanded figure and richer voice: yet, when she returned in memory to the events of the accident it was with almost childish intonation and expression. All went smoothly until Lawyer Branston, proceeding with great caution, asked: "When did you first see the car?"

The reply, carefully inculcated, should have been: "When it came out from behind the carriage." Instead the witness said: "I didn't see it at all. I wasn't looking."

"When did you hear it, then?" blundered the unfortunate counsel. "When did you realize your danger?"

"I wasn't thinking about any danger," said the girl dreamily. "I was trying to catch the cat that had my poor mousie." Instantly she clapped her hand over her mouth. "Oh! I'm sorry, Mr. Jim! You told me not to say anything about my mousie, but I forgot."

"The child's brain has been, unfortunately, somewhat affected by the shock," explained the lawyer, his face flaming. "Now, Dorothea, when you came to yourself what was the first thing you noticed?"

The girl considered. "How can I tell you," she said

piteously, "when you won't let me say anything about my mousie?"

"Just a moment," the judge interposed. "Suppose you tell *me* about the mousie, Dorothea?"

Against the tearful protests of "Weeping Jim" Branston, the witness recounted the details of the accident. When she had finished not a vestige was left of her case. Worse was to come for her counsel.

"Listen to me carefully, Dorothea," the judge instructed. "Did any one connected with this case tell you what to say or what not to say?"

"Mr. Jim told us all. He made a play-school for us and gave a prize to the girl that learned her lesson best. But when you"—she lifted her limpid black gaze to the judge's face—"told me that I had to tell the truth just as it happened, I—I didn't know what to do, quite."

"Did the other little girls tell the truth about the accident?"

"Oh, *no!* They said their play-school lesson."

"That is all, Dorothea. You have done exactly right."

Through the whispering hush that attended the girl's descent, a voice edged, curt and hard: "That man ought to be in jail."

"Silence in the courtroom, if you please," admonished the judge, trying, with eye roving far aloof from the offender, to pretend that he had not recognized Augusta Ruyland as the source of the interruption. "This case is now in the hands of the court."

In brief words he dismissed the jury, then turned his attention to James J. Branston. Before he had finished, the convicted suborner of perjury rose tottering to his feet. His soft and faithful brown eyes were lustrous with tears. His mellifluous voice was tremulous. In impassioned accents he laid his plea before the court. The whole thing was a ghastly misconception. He himself

had been innocently misled as to the true nature of the affair. To carry the matter up would mean ruin to an honorable and hard-working member of the bar and his dependent family. Errors were common to humans and zeal for a client's cause—and so on. Never had he been so falsely eloquent in the cause of any mere client, as in this, his desperate own.

Nauseated shame of the servile pathos caused Fredericka to avert her face; she caught sight of the Grand-ante. She was leaning forward in her seat, her eyes widely receptive, her delicate mouth a-quiver, every faculty absorbed. Incredulous, Fredericka saw the snugly gloved hand go to her lips, witnessed the unobtrusive conveyance of a handkerchief.

Augusta Ruyland had been moved to tears by that pitiful display of cheaply tragic buncombe!

Afterward, it developed, she had sent a plea for mercy to the judge (efficacious among other and more politically inspired pleas) and her check for one hundred dollars to the inspired weeper.

Fredericka sat, appalled. How cope with an adversary so inexplicable, so self-contradictory, so impossibly human as Augusta Ruyland?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CONGRATULATIONS showered upon Fredericka. For the most part they were prim, formal, dutiful. A Ruyland had maintained the Ruyland tradition of unassailable security; hence in felicitating her the clan was extolling its own power and preserved prestige. But the victory had not been without its wounds. Fredericka was made to feel that much, in covert smiles and probing looks. Little enough she cared for all of it, though she bore her central rôle with grace and poise; her concern was for one Ruyland only, and he, her husband, had not come to her. Resolute, she sought him out in a far corner where Mahlon and Josephus had pinned him on some matter of minor factory technique. To discuss the point that was troubling her in that public place was no part of her scheme. She began on another matter near to her heart.

"Kennion, we must do something for that girl."

"What girl?" he asked vaguely.

"Dorrie Selover. Do you realize what this means to her?"

He shook his head. "No."

"It means the loss of her hope of education, of her chance in the world. And I'm sure she's worth it. There's something unique about her."

The two other Ruylands had edged away and now departed. Kennion said in a suffocated voice: "I wouldn't have had that happen for ten thousand dollars."

The clear color of her excitement paled. But there was compassion for him in her regard as she said: "Yes;

it must have been as hard for you as for me. Harder, perhaps," she added generously, "for I had a chance to fight back."

"To sit there helpless," he burst out, "and see my wife be shown up as—as—"

"Wait a minute, Kennion. Your wife wasn't shown up as anything different from what she was."

"It sounded so damnable."

"Yes, it must have—to a Ruyland. Oh, I don't mean you so much, dear! But that roomful of faces, all watching, judging, suspecting, *enjoying*! Your Aunt Augusta loved it."

"Oh, rot!" he retorted.

"You didn't see her face, then, when I was on the stand. I did."

"She won our case for us."

"Yes, by deliberate, shameless lying." The color was back in the young wife's cheeks now, hot and vivid.

"She didn't realize she wasn't telling the truth."

"Probably not," agreed the other contemptuously. "What difference would it have made if she had? It was a question of warfare in the open, and a Ruyland mustn't lose. Impairs the prestige of the name. But when it comes to fighting from ambush—the knife in the dark—ah, that's different! Yes, your aunt had the time of her life over what she considered my disgrace."

"Freddy!"

"Oh, yes, she did!" his wife ran on. "As an object lesson showing how far a Ruyland can go wrong when he marries outside the family, I think we two must now be a deep satisfaction to the Grandante."

"It's terribly unfortunate," he fretted. "The whole thing. Why didn't you tell me about it beforehand?"

"What was there to tell? You knew the kind of life I went in for; the set I ran with. You knew there was

no real harm in it. It was just the pace of the day. I was a little fool; that's all; nothing worse. Nothing happened that night or any other time that I have to be really ashamed of. It was just such another silly party as the one you first met me at. As for telling you, did you want a diary of my life before we got engaged?"

"No, no! It isn't that. But it seemed so much worse, told that way from the stand. If only you'd let me know about your being arrested, and those other accidents—"

"I didn't want to worry you. My New York lawyer told me that nothing about it could be admitted as evidence. Besides, my dear, what could you have done if you had known?"

"Compromised the case," he cried petulantly. "Bought off that shystering crook Branston. Anything, rather than have it come out as it did."

"Do you mean that you're ashamed of me?"

"No; but—"

"You are!" she half whispered passionately. "Well, I'm not ashamed of myself. Not one bit! Not for all the Ruylands in the world. Why didn't you go to your aunt for your information if you wanted to compromise and bribe?"

"Oh, leave Aunt Augusta out of it!"

Her smile, startlingly suggestive of that of a paralytic, twisted her face slightly awry. Indeed, she felt as if something deep inside her were suffering a slow paralysis. "Can Aunt Augusta be left out of anything in our lives?"

"I'm not going to quarrel with you about her."

"There's no question of quarreling. I'm much too sad to quarrel."

His voice softened. "Oh, well; I suppose it'll all straighten out in time."

"It might, if she would play fair." She overran his

gesture of protest. "Can't you see, Kennion, that she knew exactly what was going to happen when I was called to the stand? It came out exactly as she had planned, all that about me."

"How could she know?"

"Ask her—if you dare. Oh, no; I don't mean that! But you must realize that she's got my whole record all neatly catalogued and filed away in that whited sepulcher of reputations that she keeps under lock and key. She's known all this right along."

"How do you know?"

"I accused her of it while I was on the stand and she admitted it."

"You're dreaming," cried he. "You never spoke a word to her."

"It wasn't necessary. We did it without words. Oh, we understand each other, Augusta Ruyland and I, without speech. A lot better than you and I understand each other with all the words in the world, Kennion."

"How could that be?" he marveled.

"Because we're women and hate each other; but you and I are man and woman and love each other," she explained profoundly.

He gave her his affectionate, indulgent smile. "You don't really hate the Grandante, Freddy. Just now you're overexcited with the strain of the trial."

She made a curt, despairing gesture. "All right. Have it your own way. Only, let's get away from this smothering place."

Outside, the barouche, the black horses, the black Carter, and the black figure of the Grandante were waiting. She beckoned with an air of confidence that was more than imperious; it was tyrannical in its calm, inevitable assumption. For a moment the wife hesitated; then composedly followed her husband.

"You can thank me for getting you both out of that mess," was Augusta Ruyland's greeting.

"You certainly saved the day, Aunt Augusta," returned Kennion. "You made a monkey of Branston."

The old lady turned upon Fredericka a look of complacent self-satisfaction.

"I don't intend to thank you," said the girl, "until I know how much you told Branston when he came to see you."

The Grandante's face was immobile as stone. "How do you know he came to see me?"

Without answering directly the girl said: "Dawley Cole collected those old stories for you, didn't he?"

The Grandante was silent. Her regard, steady upon the girl, showed no perturbation, rather a still and amused tolerance.

"And you turned them over to Branston, I suppose."

"Why should I do that?"

"To show me up before the family."

"You must lie in your bed as you have made it," was the oracular retort.

"Did you tell Branston?" persisted the girl.

"I don't tell all I know."

"You certainly don't. You didn't tell Kennion and give him a chance to go to Branston and stop his mouth in time. Loyalty!" sneered Fredericka.

At this the old lady's lips were gathered in closer. "I didn't tell any one," she asseverated. "Do you think a blackmailer like him wouldn't have looked it all up for himself, before he undertook the case?"

"You didn't tell Kennion," repeated the girl. "Why?"

"I don't answer questions," stated the composed and regal old lady. "*I'm* not on trial for my reputation. How many other escapades have you concealed in your past?"

"Consult your files," returned Fredericka negligently, and turned away.

Following, after a time, Kennion caught her up, but not until she had reached the gate of their yard. "Are you convinced now?" she asked him.

"She was telling the truth," he asserted eagerly. "Branston did come to see her and tried to blackmail her, but didn't get a thing. She's a bad one to try to bluff."

"As he would if he'd come to see you."

"Yes; he would," was the husband's frank admission. "I meant it about giving ten thousand dollars if necessary to shut his mouth."

"Then you *were* ashamed and disgusted and disappointed with me for—for being what I am and not being afraid to be honest about it."

"I wasn't. You're all wrong—"

"No; I'm right! You didn't love and marry me, Jinky," she hurried on, her beautiful voice sunk to a murmur of minor undertone. "You loved and married somebody built up in your own imagination—"

"We all do that," he interjected. "If we didn't there wouldn't be any romance and mighty little marriage in the world."

"Yes; but you thought you were marrying a Ruyland, like all your people, a future Ruyland. Somebody with another name and birth, but ready to be formed and molded in the image of the Ruylands forever and ever. And now the picture of something quite different from any Ruyland has been set up publicly before them all, and I'm not what you hoped, and it's hurt you. What are we going to do about that?"

"There's nothing to do. I mean, there's nothing that needs to be done."

She mounted the tall, railed steps, opened the door.

Why did the broad hallway, the still vista beyond, the whole subtle atmosphere of the home where she had lived with this man all these full months seem unfamiliar, misty? His hands touched her from behind. She was whirled about, caught into his arms, pressed strongly to him: yielded herself to the instant passion and latent remorse of his embrace.

"I know it's hard for you, Freddy," he muttered. "But what does it matter, after all? We've got each other."

As he released her, still with an arm about her shoulders, she glanced down. The crimson velvet rose, symbol of pride, of joyous defiance, was drooping at her waist, crushed and wilted in that close stricture.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IN her rôle as protectress and ruler of the Ruyland cosmos, the Grandante had graciously decided to send Dorothea Selover to a school "proper to her station and prospects in life." But the girl developed an unexpected resistance. She had, it appeared, artistic ambitions and capacities, and wanted a technical training. It ended by her declining Mrs. Ruyland's offer, greatly to the surprise and annoyance of that powerful lady.

Kennion told his wife about the futile negotiations.

"Why don't you send her away yourself to some place like the Flint School?" asked Fredericka. "We can afford it, can't we?"

"Oh, yes; we can afford it."

"Well, we owe it to her."

"But what would the Grandante think of it?" was his uneasy surmise.

"Oh, Kennion! What does it matter?" she said wearily.

"We aren't standing any too well with her as it is, since the trial."

"You mean that we've been put on the defensive because of my—my confession?"

"Well, yes. In a way."

"Am I on the defensive with you, Jinky?"

He failed to control a movement of impatience. "Oh, Freddy! It isn't a question of me—"

"It isn't a question of any one else in the world for me. I won't let it be."

He muttered something vague about "the family."

"What do I care about the family!" she rebelled. "I don't have to make myself one of them just because we're living surrounded by them. You said to me once before we were married that, whatever happened, I'd always be myself. Aren't you going to let me be myself, Kennion?"

"What else would I ever want you to be?" he returned warmly.

She managed a smile and saw the relief in his face. He never wanted to confront an issue and go through with it. Ah, well; he was Kennion, a Ruyland; she must take him as he was.

"What are we going to do about the Selover girl?" she asked.

"Whatever you like," was the amiable reply.

"Let's give her her chance, then. I can get her into the Flint School. Mother's on the board, you know."

"Could you talk to Dorrie," he asked after some hesitation, "and make her understand the necessity of secrecy, if we do send her?"

"Secrecy? About what?"

"The whole thing. The Grandante is so quick to get on the trail of things if she gets a hint to start her. I'll tell her myself, later, of course. But not just yet."

It was weariness rather than contempt which informed the voice of Fredericka's assent. "All right. I'll talk to Dorrie. I've given her a small part in my play, you know."

The play was a grand success. Instead of an orchestra Fredericka had arranged for sixteen voices from Choral Three, which organization had gone forward in great strides under the tutelage of a famous choirmaster imported from Boston for bi-weekly training. The Grandante, ensconced in a box, was both surprised and gratified, for, with an inborn musical susceptibility and apprecia-

tion, she perceived the potentialities of the performers, and foresaw that they might, as they developed, add luster to the Ruyland name in still another direction. Her pleasure was decidedly mitigated when she discovered among the basses the pudgy figure and rich voice of Josephus. That a Ruyland should mingle on any terms of fellowship, even artistic, with the people of the mills, was an infringement of prestige which she could not permit. True, she herself could give and accept repartee bordering upon the injurious with the employees, as in her chess contest with Sam Coleson; could visit them informally in their homes; could take an always welcome part in their lives; but lesser Ruylands might not with impunity follow the example of royalty, upon whose established graciousness not even the most temerarious would presume. She would speak to Josephus, after investigation (per Dawley Cole), which should also determine the source of the funds supporting Choral Three.

The real triumph of the evening, however, was Elberta's. Her mentor's prophecy, made in the early stages of rehearsal, was amply justified: she did, indeed, make them gasp. Almost fishlike was the gasping of the assembled Ruylands, who would never in the world have thought!—and so on. For Fredericka, as director, had taken some liberties with the character of the artless Nineteenth Century maiden whom Elberta portrayed, and in the second act had played her up with startling effect. Elberta, made up with an art which cunningly adjusted every touch to bringing out the splendor of the wonderful violet eyes, was more than lovely; she was a glowing, pulsating victress. If a modest flower had burst into multicolored flame, the effect could hardly have been more sensational. Fritz Gillis, endowed with a natural if somewhat flashy histrionic gift, played up to her ad-

mirably. The flaw in the performance was Ransome Case as the poetic butler: so engrossed was he in the ravishing spectacle of the heroine that he could not keep his eager eyes off her no matter where they should have rested in the action of the play; and finally all but spoiled a good scene by forgetting his lines. Fredericka, gnashing her teeth, announced her intention of giving him hell after the curtain. At the close a superb mass of crimson roses without a card came over the footlights for the director, and in the excitement of having to make a speech and receive congratulations, she almost forgot her punitive resolution, but recalled it later and, in the interests of discipline, set out to find the culprit. She found him, after a long and wide search. She also and contemporaneously found Elberta, and, after the discovery, had some difficulty in determining which head was which, for they were very close together in the semi-darkness. At her involuntary exclamation, they separated hastily.

"Well!" observed the not too scandalized director. "Is this a private rehearsal? Or what?"

"I—" began both together. Then Elberta said: "We—" and Case said: "You—" and Freddy said: "Shut up, both of you. I'll do the talking. Ransome, you were rotten. But I forgive you. Anybody could see you were not responsible. Run along now; I want a word with Berta."

But Berta took the word herself. "I started in to roast him, Freddy, for forgetting his lines, and—and then it happened."

"I should say it happened! How long has this been going on?"

"It had just begun when you inter—I'd never thought of kissing him before. Oh, Freddy!" she breathed. "I didn't know a girl *could* feel like that. I wouldn't have

believed it of myself, that any man could—could—” She stopped, all one flush of wonder and embarrassment.

“You needn’t try to finish,” said Freddy, divided between tenderness and amusement at the girl’s naïve bewilderment. “Only one man in the world can. Anyway, that’s what we all like to think, and we go around, goggle-eyed, trying to pretend that we’re not looking for that particular one. You’ve found him.”

“Yes,” murmured Elberta. “He’s found me.”

“What are you going to do about that?”

But Elberta had not thought that far. She was too absorbed in the blissful enchantment of the present.

“Josephus, for instance,” suggested Freddy.

“Josephus!” The deep violet of the eyes clouded. “Oh, I hadn’t thought about him.”

“So one might suppose. You’d better think.”

“What’ll I think?” queried the girl helplessly.

“‘What’ll I think?’” mimicked the other. “I’ll give you something to think. Do you feel like that when Josephus kisses you?”

“Josephus doesn’t kiss me. At least, just how-d’you-do kisses.”

“Oh! Well, are you engaged to him or not?”

“Engaged? To Ransome?”

“No! To Josephus.”

“Gracious! So I am—in a kind of way.”

“See here, idiot,” said Freddy, slipping an arm about the girl’s shoulders, “how much have you seen of the dark and fascinating Ransome?”

“I went to the circus with him one afternoon,” confessed Elberta breathlessly.

“Abandoned hussy!”

“And we met Aunt Augusta on the way back.”

“What did she do? Beat you up?”

“She stopped the carriage and told me to get in.”

"You didn't do it!"

"Yes, I did. What else could I do?"

Freddy shoved the girl away from her with some violence. "I could beat you up, myself. You ought to have told her to go to the devil."

"She gave me an awful talking to all the way home, for flirting with another man when I was engaged to Josephus. I wasn't flirting with him," added Elberta ruefully. "I don't know how."

"Don't waste any vain regrets over it," advised Freddy, grinning. "From what I've just seen, you're doing fairly well in that line."

"I told her that I didn't want to be engaged to Josephus, and I knew I wouldn't be happy if I married him, and she said it didn't make any difference; that I wasn't brought into the world to be happy; that it was a woman's duty—"

"Oh, I know!" broke in the young wife bitterly. "A woman's duty to marry a Ruyland and bring more Ruylands into the world to be unhappy and make others un—" She bit her lip, flushing. "Berta, I'm going to marry you to Ransome Case," she averred.

The girl gave a little gasp of mingled dismay and delight. "Do you really think we ever could?"

"If you've got the nerve to stand up and fight for your own happiness when the time comes."

"Against Aunt Augusta?" The dismay was now predominant in the cowed, Ruyland voice.

Fredericka's monosyllabic commentary was more profane than polite. "She holds you all in an enchantment of fear, that old witch!" she cried. "How *does* she do it?"

"Aren't you afraid of her?"

"No; I'm not. But," qualified the honest Freddy, "I have to keep a tight grip on myself not to be sometimes.

It's in the atmosphere of Habersham. Now, you run along and find Ransome, and stick to him the rest of the evening."

Returning, Fredericka ran into Kennion. "The Grand-ante's been asking for you," said he.

She frowned. "What does she want?"

"To congratulate you on the success of your play. She's in her best humor to-night."

Amiability quite glowed from the fine old face as Fredericka approached, but the latter sensed something behind it.

"A very excellent performance," approved the Grand-ante. "It reflects credit upon all of you. And I see," she added with a significant glance toward the half dozen nodding crimson heads at Fredericka's waist, "that special appreciation of your own efforts has not been lacking."

"Yes; aren't they lovely!" returned the young wife carelessly.

"I made the mistake, a natural one, perhaps, under the circumstances, of felicitating Kennion upon his taste in flowers."

"Did you?"

"Kennion, it appears, has no idea where they came from."

"No; he wouldn't have."

"Then you haven't told him?"

This was crass, even for the Grandante. But Fredericka suppressed her resentment; she preferred to play her cards another way. "I don't know, myself."

"But you could find out, I suppose."

"Possibly, if I chose. But don't you think," queried Fredericka sweetly, "that it would be in rotten bad taste to press an inquiry about something that one evidently isn't wanted to know?"

Clumsily expressed though it was, Fredericka noted

with satisfaction that the Grandante got her meaning; the slight tightening of the lips told so much. But it was not in her nature to relinquish a quest gracefully. "This is not the first compliment of this marked sort that you have received lately, 'I understand,'" said she resolutely.

"How do you understand that, Mrs. Ruyland?"

"Your bedroom when I was last in it suggested a conservatory rather than a place to sleep."

Fredericka puckered her brows, thinking back. When had the Grandante last been in her room? Oh, yes; that day of the tea when Kennion had so tactlessly taken her up there. But as for crimson roses, then—

"You're mistaken. I remember that time quite clearly. There were no flowers in the room then."

"There have been since. Consistently."

"Have you been in our rooms since then?"

"Yes."

"By what right? By whose permission?"

"Nobody's." The old lady's tone was equable, even pleasant. It was too apparent that she was enjoying herself for the watchful Fredericka not to suspect something held in reserve. Wisely she kept her temper and the control of her own voice and expression as she said: "Don't you think it might be regarded as presumption for you to come into my house without my knowledge and—"

"*Your* house?" The Grandante admirably feigned surprise.

"My husband's house is my house."

"Of course, my dear," replied the other in gay good humor, "but the house in which you are living happens to be the Company's house, leased to Kennion."

A sick, nauseating rage welled within Fredericka, directed not so much at the cheerful Augusta as at Ken-

nion—Kennion, whose casual neglect of fundamentals had put her in this false position. It ebbed and left her pale, and staring at a distant exit. She wanted to gain that exit, to pass out through it, never to return again; but she didn't see how the evolution was to be accomplished without taking on the significance of a retreat. She became aware of something in the doorway; some one from an outer world, from an environment free from Ruylands, standing there, smiling there expectantly. It was Robert Enderby. She flew across the room to him, disregarded his greetings and congratulations.

"Oh, Bobby! Throw me down and sit on my head. If you don't, I shall go mad and bite the nearest Ruyland."

"Steady, old girl," came his comfortable voice. "We'll go get an ice."

"A drink would go better. I need it. And don't you dare leave me. Not for a second. Not till I go home."

Estimating the nature of that concurrence between the two, Augusta Ruyland considered that she had probably discovered the source of the crimson roses.

Fredericka's natural poise and good temper had come back to her by the time she and Kennion reached home. She had intended to leave until morning the question which weighed so heavily upon her mind, but when she got upstairs she knew that unless it was settled, she would lie awake with it far into the night. She heard Kennion moving about in his dressing-room, and went in to him.

"Kennion, there's something I've got to know. Don't we own this house?"

"Why, not exactly own it, darling. It's a long leasehold. The Company owns it."

"Then has your Aunt Augusta the right to come prowling and prying here while we're out?"

"She wouldn't do that, Freddy," he replied soothingly.

"*Will* you answer me, Kennion? Has she the right?"

"As an officer of the corporation," he replied uneasily, "she has the right to inspect any of its property. It's in all the leases."

"*Oh!*" she cried. Then: "Why haven't you ever told me?"

"It never occurred to me."

She went to him, clenched her hands around his neck, pressed her cheek to his, beseeching him:

"Take me away, Jinky."

"Away? From this house? You mustn't mind—"

"No! From everything. From the place."

He was startled. "Away from Habersham? But where, dearest?"

"Anywhere. I don't care. Anywhere, where if I have children they won't grow up to be Ruylands."

He laughed uncertainly. "But they will grow up to be Ruylands, since they'd be my children too."

"But not *all* Ruyland. Not like bringing them into this strangling, smothering atmosphere."

"Are you going to have a child, Freddy?"

Her hands sagged from his shoulders. "No! *No!*" she cried vehemently. "Oh, you looked like your aunt when you asked me that. I could hate you if— Take me away, Kennion."

He was vaguely disturbed, vaguely offended by her insistence. "But that's just unreasonable childishness. Where would we go? What would we do anywhere but in Habersham?"

"Nothing." All the vitality had passed from her toneful voice. "You could never stay away if you did go. You're too deeply rooted. I might have known it." She spoke without bitterness now, accepting the inevitable. "But I haven't taken root."

He was incautious enough to remark, "That's what the Grandante says of you."

She gave him a quick, darkling stare, turned away and left him, closing the door of her room softly after her.

In the morning he met her with misgivings, feared at first that she had been crying; then thought probably not. Fredericka was not easily given to tears. But he was sensible of a still reserve, of a subtle, spiritual withdrawal; had a disturbing suspicion that, in the end, that withdrawal might not be spiritual only.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SOME one was moving about in the dining-room of that Company house which Kennion Ruyland called his home. Waking up from the day-drowse into which she had fallen over her sewing—for, even now, a fortnight after the successful production of the play, she had not got wholly rested—Fredericka went to the door. Her husband was setting back into the lock-drawer a bottle of Scotch. A full bar-glass stood on the sideboard. Kennion turned at the sense of her presence.

"Hello, Freddy. Thought you were marketing."

"I'm just going. Aren't you feeling well?"

"Sure. I'm all right. Why?"

She let her glance rest, oblique, upon the filled glass. "I wondered what you were doing away from the laboratory at this hour of the morning."

"On my way to The Rock. Thought I'd like a little bracer. Join me?" he invited jauntily.

"No; thank you. Are you lunching there?"

"Probably. The Grandante's got something on her mind."

"Then I think I'll go down and lunch with Norval. There's some Choral Three business I want to talk over with him."

"The old Grampian!" chuckled Kennion. "You certainly have got him sitting up and performing parlor tricks. How did you ever do it?"

Kennion drank his Scotch and went out, leaving Fredericka looking thoughtfully at the empty glass.

It was still foremost in her mind when she arrived

at Factory Three with two sandwiches in a serviette, and perched herself on her corner of Norval's desk, munching one of them while he paid conscientious attention to his thermos-bottle repast. Her talk of Choral Three was desultory and vague, and presently she broke through it to a more vital matter.

"There's something I want to ask you, Norval, but it isn't very easy."

He slowly turned toward her his broad face, masticating with the regularity of a reliable and smooth-running machine, but said nothing.

"You don't help much, do you?" she burst out. "I don't care. You're the only one I could ask. Is Kennion drinking too much?"

"Too much?" repeated the leaden voice. "What is too much?"

"Oh, if you're going to fence with me!"

"I don't mean to fence with you, Cousin Fredericka. But I should like to understand just what you have in mind."

"This," she said with vigor. "I have no special fear of drink either for myself or Kennion. We usually have a cocktail before dinner. But in the last few months there have been several times when I thought I caught it on his breath in the daytime, and this morning he stopped in and took a drink on his way to The Rock."

Norval sat silent for the time which it took him to swallow four large-spaced gulps of coffee. Then he said deliberately: "On his way to The Rock. Exactly."

The young wife's eyes widened. She stared at Norval as if he had conjured up an apparition. Her memory, casting a glare back into the past, confirmed the ugly inference; always it had been when he had been summoned to see Augusta Ruyland that she had noted in him the suspicious evidence.

"He does it to brace himself up for the encounter," she thought. "He's afraid of her as much as that. He's a coward." And was horrified at herself when she saw by the expression of protest in Norval's face, that she had been thinking aloud.

"Don't call ugly names, Cousin Fredericka," he objected, "until you understand the situation."

But Fredericka was reckless with pain and anger. "Spare me your defense of him," she cried. "I've had enough of Ruyland loyalty to Ruylands without your giving further examples of it."

"Do you think there is any Ruyland I would be more loyal to than you?"

Her wrath melted before the quiet of his sincerity. "No," she admitted. A moment later she stated resolutely: "I'm *not* going to let this sandwich choke me. I'm going to eat it. Every crumb. And like it! It's a *good* sandwich. I made it and I ought to know."

She was rewarded by the appearance of a dim smile on his troubled countenance. "I've got the plans for the club house here," said he.

"That's good," she cried. "Let's talk about something pleasant. Oh, by the way, Borck is coming to town to stay with Daniel Selover."

"The union organizer? Is that what you call pleasant?"

"It ought to be priceless. I've written him and invited him to the meeting of Choral Three. Is that all right?"

"Of course it's all right if you want him."

"And you're going to invite him to come to Factory Three and make himself at home. Aren't you?"

"Giving him an open chance to stir up the men? Is that wise?"

"He wants to start his unionizing in Three. Well, let's show him what we've got there, and if he can make any

headway, let him," chuckled the girl. The inclusive "we" was unconscious; he liked it the better for that.

"Perhaps he'd condescend to come and lunch with us while he was looking over the plant," suggested he.

"A grand little idea!" gurgled Fredericka. "If ghosts haunted factories, wouldn't some of the Ruylands crawl out of their graves, though!"

"Will you look at the plans now?"

They bent together over the blue prints. "Isn't it pretty elaborate and expensive?" she asked.

"It is always worth while doing these things well from the start. And, of course, the site costs us nothing."

The unsuspecting Fredericka assumed that Norval was contributing the land, and he, ignorant of the incident of the leasehold and Augusta Ruyland's intrusion into the Kennion Ruyland home, did not think to tell the girl that the club site settled upon was another such Company leasehold with all the qualifications and stipulations included.

"Norval," said she curiously, "what are you doing all this for? It isn't—well, Ruylandish."

"Perhaps it is. I think, in the long run, it's good business for the factory," said he conscientiously. "Besides, I'm finding it pretty interesting. I didn't know how interesting business could be outside of the money-making. Besides, I want to keep you tied up to Factory Three. I consider you an asset, Cousin Fredericka."

"I consider you a dear, Cousin Norval," was her warm retort, and she added: "You're awfully good to me," which is perhaps one of the most innocent and dangerous speeches a woman can make to a man.

"Well, you can be good to the organization, if you want to," he returned. "You keep your promises, don't you?"

"I don't make many. Don't like 'em."

At the look of patient discouragement on his face and

his muttered "In that case—" she relented and leaned forward to pat his arm. "Don't be a dumb-bell, Norval!" she rallied him. "What do you want me to promise? I'll do it anyway."

"Only that you'll stick by Choral Three whatever happens."

"Why, what could happen? What's your dark secret?"

"I was just thinking that it might be made difficult later for me to carry on with this thing. We've never favored employee organizations."

"But this is purely musical and social; it could never develop into anything troublesome," cried the short-sighted prophetess.

"Still, there has been some opposition already on the part of the board—"

"When you say 'the board,' you mean the august Augusta."

"Well—"

"And as you don't feel strong enough to fight her, you want me to do it for you."

He accepted the taunt, intent upon his main point. "If you wish to put it that way."

"I don't," she returned impulsively. "But you make me. I've got this vicious habit of recognizing facts when I meet them. It's a terrible blight on one's comfortable life, Norval."

"Will you stand by Choral Three, whatever happens?" he repeated doggedly.

"I will," she averred with an exaggerated solemnity, "if you won't be tragic about it."

Suddenly it occurred to her that Norval could never, by any possibility, be tragic; he might be anything else, noble, despicable, steadfast, unstable, even unconformable (she smiled privily at that thought), but not tragic;

that way derision of the unkind gods lay for poor Norval. He was looking at her now with the discomfort of the awkward mind, which, having come to the end of the conversational trail, doesn't know where to turn and start again. Necessity for invention was relieved by the arrival of Sam Coleson, upon some question of mill detail. As he was leaving, after a few chatty words with Fredericka, the telephone rang. Norval handed it to Fredericka.

"It's Kennion. For you."

She accepted the instrument. Norval, starting to leave the office, was deterred by an imperative motion of her free hand. He heard her say: "Do I *have* to go, Kennion?" . . . "It'll be a sickening bore. Maybe it'll be worse. Maybe it'll be a blow-up." . . . "Then tell her to behave like a human being and not like a divinely appointed boss of creation. I'm off this Olympian stuff." . . . "No; if I've got to do it, I'd rather get it off my chest to-day." She set down the apparatus, turned to Norval, and faintly sighed: "Damn!" As he blinked, she continued: "Does it shock you to hear me cuss, my dear? Don't lie; of course it does. Ruyland ladies don't swear, do they?"

"Aunt Augusta does."

"Good for the Grandante! That's one of her points; she isn't afraid to say and do what she likes. But why should she insist on taking me driving? I don't want to go driving with her. What's her idea?"

"It's your turn."

"And what might that mysterious statement mean, if anything?"

"It's a ceremony," explained the other. "Once a year Aunt Augusta takes every Ruyland woman out for an afternoon drive behind the blacks."

Fredericka repulsed with violence a temptation to ask Norval what his wife talked about with the Grandante, "behind the blacks," and said, instead: "I suppose I'd better go home and get into my purplest fine linen."

From his expression she could see that he deemed this the appropriate procedure. She jumped to the floor, brushing from her skirt a stray crumb or two.

"It's a promise about Choral Three, Norval," said she soberly.

After she had left, he set the hand which had met her warm grip to figuring on a pad. It made several mistakes.

Even the pair of blacks seemed to shine with a special luster as the Ruyland equipage drew up at Kennion's gate. Carter's livery was fresh-pressed; the barouche was polished like an old shoe; the Grandante herself quivered splendiferously with jet and jewels; all indicated the ceremonial nature of the event. Determined not to be on the defensive unless it were forced upon her, Fredericka had clothed herself with amiability as a garment, and responded gayly to her hostess's conversation. This, as immediately developed, was modeled upon the style and purpose of the late Mr. Baedeker. Indeed, the drive took on the color of a pilgrimage. Without orders, and as one who follows a routine mechanicalized by long habit, the impeccable Carter drove them from shrine to shrine; the Ruyland Memorial Hospital, the Ruyland Library, the Ruyland Park Zoo, the full round of the Ruyland factories, the new Ruyland Athletic Club for employees, the Ruyland Chapel, the Ruyland Art Museum in process of construction, and other monuments of local greatness, upon each of which the head of the clan discoursed historically and, as her listener was compelled in candor to admit, interestingly. It was an itinerant course in

family glory, for the instruction and, hopefully, the improvement of the catechumen.

"This will end in the Ruyland burial plot," thought Fredericka. "It couldn't end anywhere else."

Her logic was verified. At the great stone gates of the cemetery, an ancient, undisturbed, and still forested area of God's Acreage within a stone's throw of the bustling city's center of trade, Carter reined the blacks. The old lady descended.

"No vehicle goes inside," she explained. "We carry our dead in Habersham."

Overhead a hideous iron grille upbore the inscription, "Last Home." Despite the offense to her artistic taste, Fredericka liked the quaint directness of the legend. It too was Ruylandish; but in the better sense, the sense of acceptance of homely, fundamental things. She did not need to be told that the broad plateau facing the gate was the Ruyland plot; the ornate extent of the high fence, the imposing loftiness of granites and marble within, were enough. Augusta Ruyland led the way to a central space where a mausoleum was surrounded by a sentinel array of stiff shafts. Before one of these she stopped. It was very tall and rather grim; such a monument as, in its rigid simplicity and strength, should have marked the resting place of some mighty son of Anak, and she was repelled by the incongruity of such a monolith with the inscription upon it:

STEPHEN, AGED SEVEN MONTHS

Only Son of

HASLETON AND AUGUSTA RUYLAND

and the date; underneath an absurdly insufficiently-bodied angel. Fredericka thought pitifully of the tiny form below all that ponderous testimony of stone. She

glanced sidewise at the aged mother. Augusta Ruyland stood, impassive.

"My son's grave," said she.

"Did you love him?" asked Fredericka softly.

"He was a puny thing," said Augusta Ruyland moodily.

After all the years the resentment had outlived the grief; bereavement had been forgotten in the revolt against a fate which had brought forth from her strong and eager body a child too fragile to outlast infancy.

"He would have been the head of the family, after me," said she. "I would have known how to train him." Without change of tone or of the direction of her eyes, haunted by the restless ghost of an unburied disappointment, she added: "Kennion's son shall take his place."

"She's trying to bribe me," thought the young wife with disdain.

"He shall be called Stephen," pursued the brooding voice, as if uttering prophecy.

She turned away. Following her, the new Ruyland in the abode of the old was startled to see in a far corner an arc light above a small mound, sickly in the strong radiance of the day.

"Who lies there?" she asked almost involuntarily.

"Marcus Wenck Ruyland."

"What does the light mean?"

"Hope," replied the old lady contemptuously.

Fredericka repeated the word of benison, wondering.

"Some of Norval's foolishness," continued the head of the family. "Marcus was his half brother, twenty years older. He died by his own hand, in disgrace."

So harsh was the manner of speech that the girl forbore to ask details. She murmured: "And Norval keeps the light burning, for hope? I like that."

"Foolishness," repeated the old lady. She retraced her

steps to the gate of the enclosure, where she turned, lifting a black-gloved hand. "There I shall lie," she pronounced. "There you will lie; you and your children and the children born of your children." Fredericka had never before heard from her anything so nearly approaching the rhapsodic. She was a little awed. "What does it matter, who or how soon, if the Ruyland blood goes on!"

Fredericka in a recoil of the spirit felt the encompassment of the dead closing in upon her, saw herself ineluctably claimed and absorbed, passing from the environed life of quick Ruylands to drift forever along what far halls of a dull Valhalla in eternal companionship with those chill and respectable shades! With a macabre and mutinous humor she decided that if ever she found herself in that spectral parade, she would pair off with the suicidal and disgraced Marcus. At least he had perhaps lived before he died!

Augusta was outside the gate now. Her voice when she spoke again had its usual brisk emphasis. "We will go back to The Rock for tea. Elberta is to meet us. I am not pleased with Elberta."

Instantly Fredericka's oppression disappeared in the enlivening prospect of a contest whereto she was willingly committed. In a carefully careless tone she inquired:

"What's wrong with Berta?"

"Mr. Ransome Case." The mobile lips flattened. "I won't have it!"

"Ransome Case is as fine and decent as they make 'em, and he's crazy about Berta."

"I do not care to discuss the matter here," said the majestic Augusta.

Passing up the serpentine carpet to the front hall, they found Elberta waiting. The girl was flushed, anxious,

and, Fredericka reflected, more vivid and charming than any one would have believed possible six months before.

"What have you been doing to yourself?" was the Grandante's opening remark, lively with disapproval. It was not necessary that a Ruyland should be lovely in that degree—or any other! It only made for trouble.

"Nothing," said the girl. "I've just been walking."

"With young Case?"

"No."

"I sent for you because I have something that I wish to say to you about him."

Elberta's breathing became quick and distressful. "Please, Aunt Augusta, I don't want to talk about him now."

"There is no time like the present," returned the old lady, employing the formula of one of her inflexible tyrannies. "No, Fredericka, don't go," she interpolated. "You have encouraged this silly affair. I hold you partly responsible for it. It must stop at once."

"Why should it?" asked Fredericka boldly.

"Because I wish it. Because it is indecent for a betrothed woman to be indulging in loose behavior with a chance stranger."

"I haven't," denied Elberta, flaming. "And he isn't a chance stranger."

"And I suppose you're not a betrothed woman?"

"I don't love Josephus, and he doesn't love me. We'd never be happy."

"Bosh and nonsense! I won't listen to such flighty, sentimental trash. What can a child like you know about love?"

"It's supposed to be the safest basis for a happy marriage," put in Fredericka.

"You tried it. Has yours been such a success?" said Augusta Ruyland with deliberate malevolence.

Fredericka's head went up. "It won't be if there is much more family in it. Why must you continually meddle with other people's lives!" she cried passionately. "Kennion's and mine, and now Elberta's. You're not God."

"Don't be blasphemous," adjured the old lady, thoroughly enjoying the consciousness that her thrust had gone home.

"Josephus doesn't love me any more than I love him," argued Elberta.

"Josephus will do as he is bid," snapped the old lady.

"Most Ruylands do," was Fredericka's commentary in an embittered half-voice, and was hard put to it to keep her tongue from a more injurious retort, when the old lady countered with a self-satisfied: "Those do who know what is best for them."

Greatly daring, Elberta continued: "Josephus l-l-likes that pretty, brown-haired girl with the alto voice that sings next to him in Choral Three."

"Tom Carpenter's daughter," identified Mrs. Ruyland, whose eyes seldom missed anything. "I thought I noticed something at the play. I'll have a word to say to Tom, and I don't think the brown-haired siren's voice will trouble the air much longer."

"You wouldn't do that!" exclaimed Fredericka. "There's a real chance for that girl. The leader says that, with proper training—"

"Then see to it that your Choral Three is not used as an assignation place for my factory girls to meet their lovers."

Fredericka's hand went to her chin, gripping it so tight that small finger marks stood livid in the soft skin after her arm had dropped. She held her self-control, however. This was Elberta's battle; she must reserve her strength for the main issue. Augusta Ruyland was

now saying in her blindest voice: "Does this young gentleman who depicts a butler with such suspicious fidelity aspire to marry the fiancée of his employer?"

"Josephus isn't his employer," muttered Elberta.

"Nor will any Ruyland interest be if he continues pursuing a betrothed girl. As I shall make plain to him."

Elberta turned white. "If you do, he'll resign."

"The Company could survive even that shock."

"But his processes, that he has been working on so hard!"

"Would become the Company's property, in case of his connection being severed."

"That's rotten!" broke in Fredericka.

"It is the form of contract under which all research work is done in the mills. No employee, high or low, has ever lost by it, and none can claim that he has ever been treated unfairly, so long as he lived up to his obligations and respected the authority of his superiors."

"In matters with which the Company has no concern?"

"In all matters," said the Grandante with finality.

"I suppose there are other jobs in other mills," suggested Fredericka to Elberta.

"He's put everything he's got into this," lamented the girl. "All his investigations and study and experiments. It means giving up everything he's worked for, for five years."

"Or his underhanded attentions to a girl who has no right to receive them," substituted Augusta Ruyland.

"They're not underhanded," whimpered the girl.

"Don't contradict me," commanded the old lady with cheerful severity.

Fredericka jumped up and went to the weeper, giving her a pinch so sharp that it brought forth an agonized

"Ow!" from her tremulous lips. "Stand up for yourself," admonished the ally savagely. "Haven't you got any backbone at all?"

"What can I do?"

"Marry Ransome now if you love him enough, and let every Ruyland of them go to the devil."

"Oh, yes, I love him enough," was the reply in a frightened voice, "but—but—I—"

"You've got money of your own, haven't you? Or you will have; enough to keep you going until Ransome finds another place."

"Hardly," cut in the edged voice of the Grandante. "Elberta's grandfather, though a fool in many ways, was wise enough to leave his money with restrictions. She comes into her property upon her marriage *with* the consent of her parents; otherwise not until her thirtieth birthday."

The perfect Ruyland system! Old Ruylands coercing young Ruylands. Living Ruylands bound in the fetters of dead Ruylands. All working to one end as smoothly, as mercilessly as one of the great machines of Factory Three reducing the splendor and beauty of some forest beech to an amorphous, utile pulp. Fredericka felt herself sicken.

"Is it true?" she asked Elberta.

"Yes. Eight years," wailed the girl. "I'll be an old woman by then."

"You will be a contented wife and mother by then, please God," said the Grandante with pious calm.

At that the once timid Elberta sprang from her chair as if it had turned white-hot beneath her, ran to her aunt and stood before her, shaking in a passion of rebelliousness.

"I won't! You never can make me. I don't want

to be a contented wife and mother. I don't want anything but Ransome. I can't live without him."

"Go and live *with* him, then." Fredericka's voice, as she enunciated the damnable heresy, was perfectly even.

"Highly moral advice from a respectable woman to a young, unmarried girl," was the Grandante's comment. There was a sardonic smile on her lips: she could afford to be contemptuous to this kind of cheap rhetoric.

"It's a lot more moral than what you're trying to do: to force two people who don't love each other into living together. Marriage or no marriage, that is the most shameful and indecent of human relations."

Then it was not rhetoric alone! Said Augusta Ruyland with conclusive dignity, "There was no sloppy sentiment in my marriage with Hasleton Ruyland."

"And your only child hadn't enough love in his poor little body even to live."

It was the most cruel speech that Fredericka had ever made. The old, time-seasoned veteran rose to her feet, took a step forward, and wavered. Alarmed though impenitent, Fredericka ran toward her. The keen eyes which had closed for a moment opened again.

"Don't touch me," forbade Augusta Ruyland. "You are a bad woman. You are trying to corrupt and ruin an innocent girl." She sat down again, groping a little for the chair behind her.

"Did you mean it about Ransome and me?" breathed Elberta, her wondering, deep-hued eyes fixed upon Fredericka's face. She had perhaps not even heard the intervening passage with the young wife's deadly retort.

"Oh, no, no!" denied Fredericka. "Of course I didn't mean it. You never could do it. Forget it all. But I did mean that it's more decent than what she wants you to do."

"One Ruyland tried that experiment," put in the old woman, now quite mistress of herself again. "He lived in sin and paid the wages of sin, with his own hand. You saw Marcus Ruyland's grave, unmarked except by that lying light. Go back and look at it again and pray."

Some mysterious influence had freed Elberta temporarily from the dominating fear of her relative. "I've heard the story of Uncle Marcus," said she. "If you had stood by him in his trouble, he might not have killed himself."

"He reaped what he had sown," was the unmoved reply. "Shall we have tea now? Press the button, if you please, Fredericka."

The two girls looked at each other helplessly. What could one do against a woman like that!

Outside Elberta said: "The funny part of it is that when we see her again, all the hard things that were said will be exactly as if they had never been said, and she won't understand if we hold resentment against her."

"That's what makes her so hard to fight," answered Fredericka.

She went home purposefully by way of the "Last Home," passed within, stood close to the high iron fence of the Ruyland plot. A conviction entered her soul, like a melancholy peace. She gripped the cold rails surrounding the cold Ruylands.

"Never!" she whispered to them.

Never would she lie there among them; she nor her children nor the children born of her children. At the exit of the cemetery she came upon Robert Enderby.

"Are you ghost-hunting?" he demanded, staring.

"Ghost-laying," she answered with a thin smile. Then, "I wish you wouldn't always appear at the exact right moment."

"If it's the right moment, then you ought to be glad that I do."

"No. It's a pernicious habit of yours. Just when I specially want to see you, there you are!"

"What do you specially want to see me about?" he asked gravely.

"Nothing." She turned the recovered laughter of her eyes up to him. "Just to see you."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CHORAL THREE had attained to the status of an institution within six months of its first rehearsal. Shaking a dubious head over the temptation to which he had succumbed, the famous musical director had permitted the organization to take part in the bicentennial celebration of a near-by city. It was a rough performance, but the voices were fresh and vigorous, the spirit electric; and the leader had the judgment to pick homely though sound selections. A returned multimillionaire came, heard, and was enchanted; hired Carnegie Hall for a New York debut at his own expense. Musical critics came to jeer and remained, if not to praise with unstinted acclaim, at least to give serious estimate to something new, stimulating, and vivid. To the mind of Augusta Ruyland this was all for and to the greater glory of the name. She straightway contributed ten thousand dollars to the building fund and pledged herself for a handsome annual contribution.

Fredericka was doubtful about accepting it. "She will want to run the whole thing. It's her nature. She can't help it."

"Under our organization she can't do much," returned Norval, to whom the objection was advanced.

"She can make a lot of trouble. She's begun already."

"How?"

"Della Carpenter. About the best contralto we've got. She's been forced out."

"Dropped out," corrected the head of Factory Three.

"Her father made her stop."

"Yes. And why?" demanded Fredericka bitterly. "Because the Grandante went to him about it. He knew what that meant. The loss of his job as well as the girl's."

"She doesn't belong in Factory Three, anyway," was Norval's weak defense of the situation.

Fredericka pounced.

"What of it? We all agreed to go outside at the start until we had a nucleus of voices to work on. Josephus isn't Factory Three. And with Fritz Gillis we even went outside the mills. If Della *had* been Factory Three, Norval, what would you have done about it?"

The blunted form of Norval Ruyland squirmed in the chair. "What could I do, Cousin Fredericka?"

"Stick by her," returned the visitor in her clear, peremptory voice. "But you wouldn't. You'd let Augusta Ruyland come into your own factory and fire one of your employees right under your nose. Wouldn't you?"

"It has never been done."

"No: because it's never come to an issue. But you would; you know you would. Oh, there are times when I'd like to see the mills unionized just as a weapon to fight that old she-tyrant with!"

Norval looked appropriately scandalized. "Surely you don't mean that, Cousin Fredericka. You wouldn't make common cause with an agitator like Borck?"

She smiled at his perturbation. "No: I'm with the mills there. We'll fight him, but we'll fight fair. What really needs unionizing," she pursued thoughtfully, "isn't the mills, but the Clan Ruyland. The open family *vs.* the closed family. Could we get Borck to help us there, d'you think, old dear? Then if she tried to discipline one of us, the whole damfamily would go on strike. By the way, what's this about her hauling Josephus over the coals?"

Norval's face clouded. "That's the Della Carpenter affair again," said he, after some hesitancy.

"Of course. Is it true that Augusta made him quit the Choral?"

"She tried. Thus far he's refused."

"Good for the stodgy Josephus!"

"He has a little of the old Dutch obstinacy of the blood left in him. But, generally speaking, he is weak."

There was a pause. Then, "Is he worse than weak, Norval?"

"You've been hearing something," he deduced with, for him, unwonted animation. "Where from?"

"Some of the girls in the Choral have come to be pretty good friends of mine."

"Yes. I wonder how you do it," said he with admiration in his voice. "I'm afraid there's some truth in it as to Josephus."

"Does the Grandante know about it?"

"Of course. Since it was Dawley Cole that got hold of it. He saw them together last week-end."

Fredericka drew her breath. "That's bad." Then, in a rush of accusing words: "It's all the fault of that cold old devil of a woman. Why couldn't she let them see each other decently and aboveboard?"

Norval's jaw dropped. "Why, the boy was falling in love with her."

"Suppose he was. Is that such a—"

"But he's engaged to Elberta," cried the other, for once forgetting his ponderous courtesy so far as to interrupt his Cousin Fredericka. A malicious grin crinkled the corners of that young lady's sensitive mouth.

"Not to any great extent," she asserted with relish. "That little pet scheme of the Grandante's has, as I might vulgarly say if I weren't so much of a Ruyland, gone blah. Completely blah! It's a wash-out. Josephus

might better marry Della, if he's in love with her, than Elberta, whom he doesn't care a hang for."

"Marry!" Norval's lacerated feelings informed his shaken voice. "One of the mill girls?"

"Don't bleat, Norval. I simply can't stand you when you bleat. It wouldn't hurt the family a bit to get a little mixture of good, sturdy, plain stock in it. It might be the making of you, and"—she added with sinister hopefulness—"hasten the horrified Augusta's descent into the shades. But, of course, it wouldn't do," she sighed elaborately. "Poor Joe hasn't the—er—intestinal equipment to take such a chance. I might be even plainer but for fear of shocking your sensibilities, O pattern of all the proprieties. Bumping up against Augusta always makes me feel reckless in my language. What is she doing about Josephus's escapade?"

The trouble upon Norval's face darkened. "I haven't any right to tell you this, but they're going to hold a sitting on him."

Fredericka's eyes widened. "A sitting? What on earth is that?"

"A family sitting. Aunt Augusta has called it."

The girl fairly crowed with delight, a wordless outpouring of mirthful music. "Could anything be so marvelously medieval! Do you have 'em often?"

"Five since I can recall," said the accurate Norval. "It's a very serious matter."

"Beginning with a ritual of cursing and banning, I suppose. Couldn't you sneak me in, Norval, dear?" wheedled the girl. "I'd adore to hear it. Our trial would be nothing to it."

He shook his head with unimpaired solemnity. "Only the heads of families are summoned."

"Wonderful and ever more wonderful! What will they do to poor Joe?"

"Give him opportunity of explaining. If he is unable to do so satisfactorily, he will undoubtedly be disciplined."

"Incarcerated in the donjon keep of The Rock on bread and water until he repents, I suppose," she chuckled.

No reflex of amusement leavened the heavy features of her companion. "He will be compelled to give assurances of future good behavior on pain of being forced out of the company."

"But he owns stock, doesn't he?"

"It can be made unprofitable for him to continue to hold his few shares, if necessary," was the austere reply.

"But, Norval, is this sitting—heavenly word!—an official meeting of the Company too?"

"No. But its proceedings can be reported to the next meeting with recommendations."

"By the Grandante. I see. How perfectly rotten!"

"If I were employing that term, I should characterize Josephus's actions by it."

"Right. I should, myself, if it's true about him. If he's forced out of his holdings, who would take them over? You?"

"Oh, no. Aunt Augusta."

"Nobody would have the temerity to bid against her, of course."

"Nobody ever has. Josephus can decline to sell, in which case he would probably lose his position together with the salary it carries."

"Caught in the machinery! Of course he'll sell. Norval, couldn't you buy that stock for me? I have a little money."

"That would be most ill-advised, Cousin Fredericka. Small minority holdings in a corporation such as ours under—ah—um—very closely centralized control, have little value."

"Just the same," said the flippant Fredericka, "I'd like to horn in."

He disregarded the flippancy and sat thinking before asking: "You would really wish to become a stockholder in the company?"

"I would. Really."

"I will make a note of it." He did so with precision in a leather-bound book which he took from the safe.

"Then you'll bid for me on Josephus's stock?"

"Oh, no! Really, I could hardly do that, Cousin Fredericka. You see, Aunt Augusta will expect—"

"And what she expects she's got to have! I might have known. Never mind it. When is this precious sitting?"

"Either Wednesday or Thursday afternoon."

"It can't be Thursday," she objected. "Not for you. I've arranged for Christian Borck to come to the factory that day, and you've got to be here to be amiable to him. Nobody knows about his visit yet."

Optimism led Fredericka astray here. With his invaluable faculty for picking up bits of information, Mr. Dawley Cole had learned of the prospective visit and had told his patroness about it.

"Don't believe it," returned Augusta Ruyland. "Norval wouldn't be such a fool."

"Probably he is not informed," said the gentlemanly spy, who was not too well-informed himself. "If you could make it convenient to happen in at Factory Three—"

"I'll make it convenient," said Augusta Ruyland with emphasis.

Whatever surprise Mr. Christian Borck may have felt at his hospitable though formal reception in Factory Three, he concealed. His face seemed made with special reference to concealment. It was round, dull-skinned,

and neutral in expression with full, almost pulpy lips, a big, positive nose, and eyes so lazy-lidded as to suggest the misty speculations of a drug dreamer. His manner was gentle and tired. For the rest, he was a small man in large clothes which would have looked grotesque thus misfitted to any one else, but upon him appeared only roomy and comfortable.

Norval was agreeably disappointed in him; had anticipated a much more aggressive personality. Nothing dangerous about this slow-spoken little man, he guessed; certainly nothing violent. With diminished reluctance he pursued the course outlined by Fredericka.

"The factory is open to you," said he, with a stiff acceptance of the situation which, he was innocently sure, Cousin Fredericka would have approved as a pattern of graciousness. "Go wherever you want to."

Borck considered. "What about talking to the men?"

"Within reason. You can hardly expect to hold a meeting in working hours."

"No. I wouldn't expect that," conceded the labor organizer. "Who is going along with me?"

"Nobody. Unless you wish it. I thought you would rather talk to our men alone."

"Last time, the police ran me out," murmured Borck. "All the way to the train. They presented me with some advice and a ticket. I don't know who paid for it. It was all illegal."

"I might take issue with you there if I chose to argue," returned Norval, "but it is beside the question. You are here as"—he swallowed thickly—"our guest."

"Nothing could be fairer than that," allowed the visitor, and cocked an eye at his host to see whether he knew the story. There was no response in Norval's heavy countenance. He was not by way of being familiar with the current sprightly stories of the day.

Out in the bustle of Factory Three, Christian Borck found many acquaintances. Some were receptive, some hostile, some argumentative in a friendly way, some suspicious, a few merely glum; but all were interested. Borck had his own way of interesting his own kind of people. It was his principal stock in trade.

There, in the middle of the afternoon, Fredericka Ruyland found him. He at once withdrew from the little group around him and went to meet her, a look of alert interest not unmingled with pleasure relieving the soddiness of his face.

"Why, if it isn't Miss Gage!" he exclaimed, shaking the hand she held out to him. "Mighty glad to see you again."

"Now, Mr. Borck!" She twinkled at him. "You know better than that. 'Miss Gage.'"

"Maybe I do," he admitted. "But I kinda hoped you'd be woman enough to keep your own name and identity even if you did marry a Ruyland."

"Do I strike you as having lost my identity?" she challenged.

His appraisal of her was slow, careful, concentrated, and as inoffensive as that of a child. "You do not," he pronounced.

"What do you think of us here?" she asked, lifting her hands with a little flutter that indicated the whole big plant where they stood.

"You've done a job! A good job. Too good from my point of view. That's why you fixed it for me to come here, isn't it? Showing off your handiwork?"

"Clever man!"

"What's this Choral Three?" he asked abruptly.

She explained. There was pride and enthusiasm in her description which, in spite of herself, took on a touch of the proprietary. Borck's heavy eyes were wandering

as she talked, but this did not signify any lack of interest.

"So," he commented at the finish. "Sort of a shop union with musical settings. Hey?"

"Certainly *not*."

"No? But it might turn into that." He mused darkly. Out of that darkness came a flash of speech. "You run Factory Three," he accused.

"I!" cried the girl in sheer amazement. "What makes you say such an idiotic thing as that?"

"Idiotic? Phuff! Whatever you say, or want without saying, goes here. Don't you suppose I know that? Or"—he lifted his cool gaze to hers, with a slow surmise—"didn't you maybe realize it yourself till I told you? Maybe you didn't."

"It's all nonsense," she disclaimed, but her tone, though vehement, was without conviction.

"Who else ever could have put over Choral Three," he argued dispassionately, "on that hard-baked Dutch image in there?" He jerked a discourteous thumb toward the office, where Norval Ruyland at that very moment was working with absorption upon an estimate for carpeting the club house. "You're It, all right, here. I don't like it. I'd a lot rather fight him than you. He's an easier proposition."

"Why should you fight any of us? We're doing everything that the union demands, and more, for our employees."

"Principle," said he with a vague gesture. "It's the principle of the thing." Without a change of the gentle voice he shot at her the inquiry: "Bumped up against the Lord Goddess Almighty yet?"

"Do you think for a minute that I'm going to discuss my family affairs with you, Christian Borck?" she returned with imperturbable good humor.

"Oh, family! I didn't mean that. Of course you've had your troubles there. That's a cinch. You're up against it, I'm afraid, and it's a stiff proposition. I'm sorry for you."

"You needn't be." The girl's color rose. "You seem to think yourself extremely well informed."

"Well, I have to find ways of picking up bits of information about any local situation I'm interested in," said he modestly, "and you're part of the situation here. A mighty important part. What does the old lady think of your Choral Three?"

"She's contributed to it."

"Look out!" he warned. "*Look* out. She's no fool, that old bird. She knows what's going on."

"Does she know that you're here in Factory Three?" teased Fredericka, and was disconcerted at his prompt retort:

"Bet you two to one she does. Probably that explains the scared-looking ledger-scribbler fidgiting and fussing in the doorway yonder. He's been looking for a chance to butt in for the last five minutes."

Fredericka turned and nodded to the clerk from Norval's office.

"It isn't for you, Mrs. Ruyland," said the man advancing. "Mrs. Ruyland—the other Mrs. Ruyland wishes to see this gentleman in the office at once. She told me to be sure to say at once," he added apologetically.

Borck grinned into the annoyed face of Fredericka. "Like to come along and see the fireworks?" he said.

"No."

"Afraid?"

"Yes. A little. I'll come."

His grasp fell upon her wrist, hard and friendly. "You're *good*!" he declared in an admiring mumble.



A Universal-Jewel Production.

"ARREST THAT HUSSY FOR RECKLESS DRIVING!"

Siege.

In Norval's office Augusta Ruyland sat, enthroned. To be sure, it was nothing more intrinsically regal than Norval's stiff office chair that supported the trimness of her form; but she had the faculty of making anything in which she ensconced herself take on the aspect of the seats of the mighty. If she was astonished at seeing Fredericka, she gave no sign of it, but accorded to her the word of politeness due to a Ruyland. To Borck she gave no greeting, but said at once: "What are you doing here?"

The quiet imperiousness of the tone was more provocative than an epithet would have been. Fredericka wondered how Borck would take it. Would he put himself at an initial disadvantage by showing irritation? Although she was fully committed to a course opposed to everything that his visit represented, in essential sympathy she was his partisan as against the Grandante. He stood before that ruler of men, hat in hand, his eyes on the floor, not unlike a schoolboy anticipating a difficult examination, earnest but without foreboding.

"Going through the factory, seeing some of my friends."

"By what right?"

He jerked his chin toward the nominal head of Factory Three. "Ask him."

"I'm asking you."

"Ask him," repeated Borck with unabated calm.

"I gave my permission," put in Norval nervously.

"*Your* permission!" Augusta Ruyland grudged the half-second taken up by the side glance of scorn that she gave him before her rigid regard swung back to the intruder. "I think we can dispense with your presence, Norval."

"In his own office!" thought Fredericka. She flushed hot for his shame. "If he goes now, I'll despise him

forever." She found herself speculating upon what Ken-nion would have done in the same circumstances.

Involuntarily, at the word of dismissal, Norval had risen. He turned to Fredericka, saw the burning fire in her cheeks, the smoldering fire in her eyes, and sat down again.

"I've got some work to do," he mumbled. "If you want to talk to this man, Aunt Augusta, I'll have the next office cleared."

Weak! But it was better than supine obedience, at least.

"Who's running this factory?" queried Borck. "I'd like to know who I'm dealing with." He knew perfectly well, but the question was sound tactics.

"Me," said Augusta Ruyland.

If, after that comprehensive monosyllable, Norval chose to stay, let him stay. She was at his desk, in the place of control, of command; he in a small chair against the wall. Her eyes dared him. He shuffled his feet on the floor, but said nothing. The club house plans, which he had picked up when his aunt entered, he now surreptitiously insinuated into the pocket of his black gabardine office coat.

(Sensitive, as women are, to clothes, Fredericka reflected that if there was such a thing as office slavery, the black gabardine coat should be its brand. You couldn't imagine the Grandante wearing it. Nor, for that matter, Christian Borck.)

She was addressing him now, with an elaborate veneer of courtesy. "Since you have done us the honor of coming to inspect our plant, perhaps you will give me the benefit of your opinion of it."

"Pretty good," said Borck under his breath.

She bowed. "I am flattered to know that you approve."

"Not but what it might be better."

"Do you think your union could improve it?" she asked ominously.

"Maybe. In some respects," answered the cautious Borck.

"Don't we pay union wages?"

"Yes, and better," he returned, with a frankness that surprised her.

"Don't we treat our people fairly? Did you hear any complaints?"

"Bless you! Lots of 'em."

"*What!* Our workmen complaining to an out—"

"Now, don't you get flustered, ma'am," he put in mildly. "You've got mostly American labor. They always kick. Especially when they're well off. They'd kick if you *gave* 'em the mill."

"Precisely what your unions want to compel us to do, I believe."

"Eventually," he agreed. "We're not ready for it yet. Now, Mrs. Ruyland, will you let me talk for three minutes?"

She glanced at the clock. Following the direction of her eyes, he relaxed his look of immobility for the moment. "Talk ahead," said she.

"I'm going to lay my cards on the table. This is a hard job of organization they've put up to me. Your people are slaves—hold on, Mrs. Ruyland; you gave me my time; take out ten seconds if you're going to interrupt—"

Augusta Ruyland laughed aloud. "I apologize," said she. "Go on."

"They're slaves, but they don't know it, because you treat 'em so well. Until they find it out, I can't do much with 'em. My problem is to educate them. You ask me if the union would make conditions any better; no,

it wouldn't. You're above union specifications in every respect, almost, except some details of safety."

"One minute. Is that in the vats?"

"Right! I see you know your own business," he answered with enhanced respect. "You're the highest type of slave owner, all right. We'll put it that your wage slaves are better off than most union labor. Yes; but you ain't going to live forever. Your heirs may get into a jam, and before it's over the banks will have the property, and then look out! If there's no union to protect the men, where'll they be? That's why I'm going to stick to this job of unionizing Habersham."

"How do you think you're going to do it?"

"Meetings."

"I'll have you run out of town."

"You did it once. I forgot to thank you for the ticket to Boston, by the way." He grinned. "But it won't work again. Not unless you want to go up against the courts. We've fixed that."

"Through your demagogues in the Legislature."

"Well, I seem to have heard somewhere that the Ruylands were generous contributors to the campaign funds," he returned with his lifeless smile. "You didn't get that mechanical safety bill smothered for nothing."

Augusta Ruyland flushed. "I won't have any fool politicians telling me how to run my business, any more than I'll have any anarchistic labor unions giving orders to my men. I'll talk to you about that in a minute. . . . Norvall!"

The nominal head of Factory Three, roused from his absorption, looked up, to meet the sharp question:

"Why haven't those knife guards been furnished for the beater vats?"

"It's a new-fangled thing," protested Norval. "We've been waiting—"

"Waiting!" she repeated bitterly. "Four of our men have been injured in the last month, through preventable accidents."

"Five," interjected Borck.

"Four. The other man was drunk. Those guards must go in at once, Norval. I won't have my people maimed and their lives endangered when there's a way to prevent it."

"Benevolent slavery," murmured Borck. "Oh, it's a hard proposition to go up against, all right."

"And, now, Borck," said Augusta Ruyland, "I know all about your labor unions and your labor plots. Knew 'em before you were born. When the big strike was called on us and your people would have burned down the mills—"

"They weren't my people," he interrupted. "You employed a lot of cheap labor, Frenchies and Portugoosies and that lot of scabs and you got what you deserved when they turned on you."

"They got what they deserved," she said grimly. "We fought 'em off with guns in our hands, my husband and I."

"And you had the biggest gun."

"I was the best shot," said she simply.

"You were the best man. Oh, I know all about the Ruyland history."

"And you come here thinking to change it," she caught him up scornfully. "There'll be a Ruyland at the head of these mills"—her gaze flickered upon Fredericka momentarily with an inscrutable implication—"when the last labor agitator is hanged or in jail. We've built these mills, stone by stone, one by one, and sweated in them and fought for them and brought them through good times and bad, and you think we'll tolerate you and your Bolshevik meetings? Trying to undermine our work, spread the poison of discontent among our people,

stir up riot and murder. Man!" She leaned forward over the desk, lowering her voice. "I've seen dead bodies laid out in a row along that wall back of you. A man bled to death on that couch."

He stared at her. "Did you kill him? I bet you did."

"I killed one of them," she returned, unmoved. "Hold your meetings if you want to. But any man, woman or child in my employ that attends one of them, or even looks in at the door, loses his job."

"How about that for Factory Three?" inquired Borck, turning the slant of his incurious eyes upon Norval Ruyland.

"That is all right," muttered Norval.

"It's all wrong!" interjected Fredericka. "Why not let them go and hear what he has to say? What have we got to be afraid of?"

"*We!*" The word took on a venomous force as Augusta Ruyland echoed it. "What is your special interest in Factory Three, may I ask?"

Furious at having thus exposed herself to a snub for which she had no retaliation, Fredericka slumped back in her seat.

"If it were the best man in the mills," resumed the cool relentlessness of Augusta Ruyland's voice, "and he is found going to your meeting, he gets his last pay in the morning."

Borck shook an incredulous head. "You wouldn't quite dare do that," said he.

"Wouldn't I!" she retorted in triumphant disdain. "Try it and see."

"You'd have your spies outside to spot 'em, wouldn't you?" he ruminated. "But, all the same, I don't believe you'd go that far." He seemed quite dejected over the threat.

"Why, the man's acting like a fool," thought Fred-

ericka, puzzled. A second thought qualified her first. "If I were the Grandante, I wouldn't go too much on that appearance."

That potent old lady was now in the full sweep of a righteous and loyal indignation. "As long as I live or any member of my family lives in Habersham, the Ruyland Mills will be conducted on Ruyland principles. I'd rather see them blown stone from stone than turned over to the control of such scum of Europe and yours."

The labor leader looked pained. "What do you mean, scum of Europe?" he protested.

"Borck!" she snorted. "What *are* you? What rat hole of the Baltic do you come from? What bastard race sends men like you to stir up hate and crime in our America?"

"Bastard, yourself," he retorted with the first touch of animation he had exhibited. "There were Borcks in the Mohawk Valley before the first Ruyland that got a little money changed his name from Rullens because it wasn't swell enough."

"You lie, you oaf!" shouted Mrs. Ruyland.

"Keep your hair on, Grandma," advised the dull-eyed little man, "and don't try to put anything over on me about your family or any other of the old American stock, because I know 'em inside out. My great-grandfather brought the bricks that rebuilt the first Ruyland factory after the big fire, up this river in his schooner."

"Borck . . . Borck," said the Grandante faintly. "Adrian Van Borck! Good Lord! I've got his letters and contracts in my deposit boxes. So you're his kin! And you pretend to be a gentleman?" she demanded.

"God, no!" said he. "What would I want to do that for?"

"You ought to be, if you're a real Van Borck. Are you legitimate?"

"You bet!" he grinned. "Not that it's of any importance. And if I've dropped the Van because it wasn't any use to me when I had to go to work with my hands or starve, as my father had to do before me, and was worse than no use, when I began to work up in union circles—they wouldn't understand it—it isn't as bad as what your folks did with their name."

"I shouldn't think," put in Fredericka hastily, "that an interest in genealogy would fit in with your work. Do your union friends understand that?"

His face developed a disarming smile. "No, they wouldn't," he confessed. "But a man's got to have something to keep him interested. My hobby's old American stuff. I started it on a trunkful of old records that I found in gran'dad's house and I've kept it up ever since. Gran'dad was the last gentleman in our family; drank himself to death and left nothing but debts. I'm a member of the American Genealogical Society," he chuckled, "under a fake name. If some of the fellows knew that, they'd have me on the carpet as a traitor to unionism."

"What is to prevent their being informed?" inquired the Grandante icily, "if you undertake to make trouble for us?"

He turned upon her the look of one both shocked and incredulous. "What! Use stuff on me that came out in a friendly conversation? You wouldn't do that!"

("Friendly!" whispered Fredericka to Norval. "Heavens!" But Norval seemingly failed to hear, being sunk in a brown study.)

"Drat the man!" said Augusta Ruyland. "I almost like him. But you're all wrong about the Rullens name, Borck. That was another family that married into ours."

"I've heard that too," he admitted. "Thought it was all camouflage."

"The records are clear." She was speaking to him as to an equal now. "I've got them all."

"Have you?" he cried eagerly. "I'd like to see those."

"Come up to The Rock with me, then," she invited promptly. "Come to dinner." Then, as he hesitated, looking down at his apparel. "Oh, damn your clothes!" she cried impatiently. "I want to prove to you that you're absolutely wrong."

"All right," he agreed, and they went out together to where Carter, patient, upright as a statue, and far too experienced to be amazed at any companionship entertained by his employer, sat waiting.

Norval heaved himself out of his chair with an effort, shambled over to his desk, fussed with aimless fingers among some papers.

"Do you think I'm a coward, Cousin Fredericka?" he asked after an ugly silence.

"I can't understand you," she evaded.

"What do you think your husband would have done in my place?"

She started at this enunciation of her own moody thought. "Don't be childish," she admonished with a tinge of contempt.

"I guess I am like a child," he mumbled. "Children are always wanting what they can't have."

"But you've got it," she cried. "Yours is the controlling authority in Factory Three. Why don't you exert it?"

He flapped his thick arms helplessly and let them fall on the desk before him, his hands splayed out. Had he dropped his head between them it could hardly have been a more convincing gesture of surrender to a higher mastership.

"Oh, you make me *sick*!" said the girl very low. "Isn't there any manhood left anywhere in you Ruylands?"

Has the Grandante got it all? What could she do to you if you had stood up to her and said: 'I'm responsible for Factory Three and as long as I'm responsible, I'll give the orders'?"

He drew in his hands slowly, and shifted the dull gleam of his eyes to her face. "Do you want to know what would happen? Here!" He drew a pad to him and penciled a rough oval on it, surrounded by smaller ovals. "Here's the table where we sit in council. She's at the head." Unconsciously he had drawn one figure twice as large as the others. "Mahlon's next to her on one side; I'm on the other. Then there's Calvert, John, Josephus, Kennion, Rudolph, and Peter W., 3d. Sometimes Selah B. comes in from his greenhouses, but only to stockholders' meetings. Aunt Augusta would sit there with a face like a cliff and report that the family policy was being undermined in Factory Three. John would sniffle and say that we must all work together for the best good of the Company. Peter W., 3d, would snuff and agree. Calvert would wipe his glasses and boom out something about matters of general policy being best left to the chairwoman of the board. Kennion—well, you know better than I what he would be likely to do. Mahlon would lean over to me—we're friends as well as cousins—and whisper that he was with me, but what could we two do against the rest? Selah, if he were there, would grin at us all like a contemptuous gargoyle: Rudolph would puff and try to look intelligent, and Josephus would sulk. What can you do against a combination like that!"

Fredericka stared at him with a species of admiration. "Norval, I wouldn't have believed you had it in you. You've given me a picture to frame and hang in my family gallery. Is that the way corporations are run?" she marveled.

"It's the way this one is run. It isn't a corporation, though; it's a despotism. Everything's settled in council and she runs the council."

"But I thought it was the Ruyland policy to let each head run his own plant."

"Until she chooses to interfere," was his gloomy qualification. "She has had her hand in the affairs of every factory. It's got to be admitted," he gruded, "that practically everything she does comes out right."

"Would you really sit quiet and let her discharge your men over your head?"

"Well, I think she's right in this," he defended. "For that matter, she'd direct me to do the discharging, as a matter of form. She's always correct, unless she loses her temper."

"And you'd do it?"

"What else could I do? If I refused, the council would back her up and she could always get the votes officially, if I made a fight; so the men would have to go just the same."

"You could resign."

"Resign?" he repeated stupefiedly.

Fredericka gave a short laugh. "No; of course you couldn't. Any more than you could shoot yourself. But why not give her a fight, anyway? Just to start something."

A quiver passed through his thick frame. "You don't know her tongue. She'd pick out something on me and never let up on it."

"But what could she find to pick?" asked the girl, incredulous.

"How do I know? She'd find it." He gathered himself and said effortfully: "She made me the laughing stock of the family about my—my falcons. I let 'em go." His hands fluttered in the air grotesquely, pathetically.

"Poor old Grampian!" Her voice was soft music. "So her tongue is the lash with which she keeps you all in order!"

"That's part of it. But it's more that we've all got so used to taking her say-so. It's a tradition."

"It's bad enough to have dead people ruling by tradition, without having live ones," said Fredericka in the manner of the oracle. "Norval, that man Borck is going to make trouble."

He shook his head. "What can he do? Aunt Augusta will be too much for him or any of his kind."

"Aren't you on to his game? He got her to commit herself that she'd fire any man who went to one of his meetings. Now, if he can get some of the older and more important men to attend, perhaps by taunting them with being afraid, she'll have to make good, and that will be the beginning."

"Of what?" said he stupidly.

"Of almost anything! It's the grievance that he needs in his business that he's trying to establish. You remember, I told you his principle: no grievance, no chance to unionize. Well, the Grandante is going to play right into his hands. She's going to present him with the finest kind of first-class grievance, if she isn't stopped. It's up to you to stop her."

"Me! Stop Aunt Augusta Ruyland from doing anything she is set on?"

"All right. I've warned you."

At that moment, Augusta Ruyland and Christian Borck, seated at a work table in a quiet room of The Rock, upon which two glasses emitted the fragrance of a time-softened whisky, had just finished the perusal of some ancient marriage and birth records.

"You're right, Mrs. Ruyland," said the labor leader handsomely. "I take it all back. There are Rullenses

and Ruylands and you're the straight-line Ruyland lot."

"Why don't you quit this anarchistic business you're in, Borck?" said the old lady in a friendly tone. "You're fit for something better than that."

He shook his head. "This is my line. Now, I'll give you a bit of advice because—well, put it because we've have a good talk together. Don't you fire any of your men just for coming to my meetings. Shucks! I won't hurt 'em."

The lines of the fine Ruyland face before him grew rigid as granite. "The day I find it out," she retorted, "they go. Yes, the hour."

"That's your affair, then," he shrugged. "The warning was meant friendly."

"It isn't so taken. We'll talk of something else."

Christian Borck did not call his meeting at that time. Being wise and patient, he judged it better to wait. On his way to the station he stopped at Factory Three. There, posted on the gate bulletin, was a warning to all employees to avoid meetings called by him or "any other labor agitator" on pain of instant dismissal.

Borck smiled his obscure smile. He was well satisfied.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

MAN lives not by bread alone, but to a great degree by euphemisms wherewith he bolsters his perishable self-esteem. Mr. Dawley Cole, the gentlemanly private reporter, was always and forever "happening on" things. Strangely enough these fortuitous bits of information were likely to be such as would specially interest his patroness. Cheerful of countenance and beyond sartorial criticism in his braid-bound morning coat with its modest flower, he would trot around to The Rock and, after due preliminary formalities, be admitted to the Conspiratory, where he would euphemistically deliver his goods. On this occasion the message dealt with what he deemed to be a ticklish situation.

"I happened to be outside Factory Three at closing hour yesterday."

"And did you happen to overhear what the men were saying?" asked the grim Augusta.

Mr. Cole's sleek gray head waggled in a disconnected manner indicative of foreboding. "They are quite stirred up over the bulletin."

"Let 'em stir."

"They claim they have a right to go to any meeting they like outside of factory hours."

"Let 'em try it."

"It was a vital mistake ever to allow that man, Borck, in the mills," declared Mr. Cole with heat. From his manner he might have been impugning the judgment of Mrs. Ruyland. But well did he know (the politic little strategist!) her attitude toward labor agitation, besides

having an adequate outline of what had happened at the encounter in Norval's office.

"When is he going to call his meeting?"

"Borck? Oh, he's left town. You gave him a scare, Cousin Augusta."

Being wise in reading character, the Grandante had her doubts. But she said only: "Perhaps there will be a meeting without him."

"There was some hot-headed talk among the men of holding a meeting of protest."

"Yes?" She yawned. "Let 'em protest. There's no rule against that. Who did most of the talking?"

"I happened to have a notebook in my pocket"—in a tone of self-gratulatory surprise at himself for being so opportunely equipped—"so I just—"

"Give me a copy of the names on this sheet of paper."

The task completed and the paper, to which she vouchsafed hardly a glance, delivered, the private reporter resumed: "I was really quite troubled by the ungrateful spirit of criticism—"

"Oh, don't bore *me* with your troubles!" cut in his patroness with what he could not but regard as a lamentable illogicality. "I'll take care of all that when the time comes. I've got more important matters for you now. Dawley, who is spending a small fortune on roses for Kennion's wife?"

Mr. Cole knew something about those roses, but not enough. "Oh, hardly a small fortune," he deprecated. "Once a week, or hardly more than that."

"Where from?" she insisted implacably.

"New York."

"The florist, man! The florist."

"I chanced to be calling upon Mrs. Kennion last week"—he did not mention that he had chanced, after some quite ingenious investigations at the express office, to see

the special messenger going out, and that he had timed his call accordingly—"when the box arrived. The name was Carterson & Emcke of Park Avenue."

"Hmph! How did she take it? Confused? Embarrassed?"

"No. She looked quite pleased." Mr. Cole himself looked far from pleased. "She gave some of them to me to arrange while she took the rest up to her own room. When she came down she said to me: 'Dawley, are *you* the mysterious and benevolent stranger who's been sending me these lovely roses?' I said I wasn't. I'm not, you know," said Mr. Cole innocently.

The Grandante laughed consumedly, and with a meaning which Mr. Cole took as rather unflattering. Why shouldn't he send roses to a pretty woman if he chose!

"I should think not! But what a hypocrite that girl is!"

"No; I really think she doesn't know, herself," said Dawley Cole, which testimony of faith elicited only a grunt of contemptuous ferocity from the inquisitress.

"Do you think Kennion knows about her getting them?" she asked presently.

"Oh, I'm sure he does!"

"And he doesn't object?"

"The modern husband—"

"Is a paltry fool and a slave to any silly flirt of a wife. I'll take that up with him when I get around to it. You've been to New York since you got the florist's name, haven't you?"

"Yes, Cousin Augusta." He repressed an inclination to wriggle.

"Well?"

"There was nothing to be found out there."

"I suppose you tried?"

"Oh, yes; I tried."

"Well, nobody can do more," she commented with unexpected magnanimity. Then, abruptly: "Dawley, who's this Robert Enderby that's hanging around her?"

The private informationist brightened. Here he was thoroughly at home. "Nephew of Willis Enderby," said he, "the distinguished lawyer who committed suicide over Camilla Van Arsdale, you remember. Left quite a slice of his money to this boy. They're quite all-right people, the Enderbys. One of them married a Ruyland, three or four generations back." And he delivered an offhand outline of the family that would have done credit to the genealogical Borck himself.

"Married into our family, eh?" said the old lady thoughtfully. "I'd forgotten that. I'll check it up later." She nodded toward the steel-bound archives. "But now I want to know about this young man."

"Wild. Drank his way through college and took a postgraduate course in the same," said Mr. Cole, quite pleased with this witty way of putting it. "Everybody said when he came into old Willis's money that he'd go to the devil on wheels. It had just the opposite effect. He went off the drink, took a position in an engineering office that had been open to him any time he would sober up, and they tell me he's going to make his mark in the profession."

"Don't you suppose I know all that part of it? He is replanning our mechanical arrangements in the mills, and doing it well. How long has he known Fredericka?"

"From childhood, I should think."

"In love with her?"

"He was at one time," answered the prudent informer.

"She in love with him?"

"Oh, Cousin Augusta! Surely there has been nothing in Mrs. Kennion's conduct—"

"What do you know about her conduct? Have you seen 'em together?"

"Once, on the street. Besides the day of the trial," he responded, after a pause for recollection.

"Well, you keep your eyes open. I believe they're meeting. He's here part of every week now on the factory business. Ever occur to you to connect him with the crimson roses?"

Mr. Cole winced. She was back on that undesirable topic. Might know she'd never drop anything she once took between her teeth. It *had* occurred to Mr. Cole that young Enderby might be the "mysterious and benevolent stranger," an assumption upon which he had proceeded with neutral though painful results.

"I don't believe he's the one," said he feebly. "Wouldn't Mrs. Kennion know it if he were?"

"You let that little trickster fool you? Didn't you even take the trouble to make inquiries at the florist's?"

Yes; it appeared that Mr. Cole had made inquiries; had, in fact, made one more inquiry than was tactful. A brutish store manager, overhearing, had approached with the insulting challenge: "What are you? A private detective or a 'Town Topics' paragrapher?" and suggested his departure.

"What did you do?" the Grandante asked with hard-bitten lips.

"Purchased seven dollars' worth of cut flowers to be sent to a friend in hospital," replied Mr. Cole with accurate dignity.

Her laughter rang. "Dawley, you are a prize! Charge 'em to me. No; I insist. Drop the florist end. I'll look into that when I go to New York. Give me the address."

Whether Mrs. Ruyland was more tactful than her emissary, or more successful merely by virtue of more

presence and greater directness, she returned from her metropolitan trip—a rare journey for her, New England-satisfied soul that she was—with results which divided her between gratification and puzzlement. “There are ways and ways of doing these things, Dawley,” said she pompously. “I found the man most courteous.”

“Did he tell you who sent the roses, then?” asked the private reporter enviously.

“Not the name.” She shook her head. “No; not the name. I really believe . . . What the devil do you mean by sitting there with that smug, offensive grin on your silly face!”

“I *beg* your pardon. I really *beg* your pardon!” babbled the little man. “I meant nothing.”

“Then listen, and don’t interrupt.” She leaned forward, checking off the points in the air with a slender finger. “Fredericka’s floral adorer is a middle-aged man unknown to the florist, who speaks quite low. He has been there but twice and each time left a cash deposit of two hundred dollars. Two—hundred—dollars,” she repeated with impressive spacing. “He was dressed in dark clothes but not in mourning, and the clerk thinks he wore a pince-nez. I can’t imagine who it could be unless it’s some one she picked—Dawley Cole! What are you gawping that way for? You *know*. You’ve guessed. What?” She bent to him, reading his breathless lips. “*What?*”

Her body jerked back, stiffening all over. She had got it.

“My God, what a fool I’ve been!” she gasped.

“Maybe it isn’t—”

“It is. A hundred things show it. Call up Factory Three, Dawley, and—no; wait a moment.” A thin smile overspread her features. “Press that button.”

The prune-and-prismish secretary promptly appeared.

"Family dinner, if you please, Miss Owen, for—let me see; the 20th."

"Small or full list, Mrs. Ruyland?"

"Full. To consider."

"To consider," repeated the automaton. "Yes, Mrs. Ruyland." She made her note and withdrew.

"Absolute secrecy on this, Dawley," directed the Grandante. "That is all to-day."

Still in a murk of astonishment, Dawley Cole followed Miss Owen, shaking his head over wonders that would never cease.

Left alone, Augusta Ruyland frowned out into vacancy. "Norval! Norval *Ruyland!*" she muttered.

The smile returned to her lips, grew finer, thinner, keener until it divided her face like a blade of chilled steel.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"Did you get an invitation from The Rock?" inquired Kennion Ruyland across the breakfast table.

He spoke with a shade of diffidence. Since Fredericka's futile appeal to be taken away from Habersham and the Ruylands, the Grandante and all things immediately connected with her had been avoided as a topic of conversation, in so far as this was possible in an environment permeated, not to say saturated with that preponderant personality and influence. It is a danger signal in married life when there are intimate topics which must be dodged. It points the way to other evasions and concealments.

Fredericka Ruyland, by nature more open than her husband, answered him: "We've got a summons from Mrs. Ruyland. I should hardly call it an invitation." She tossed over to him the square of Ruyland Bond upon which was presented, with the highest perfection of the engraver's art, the form employed in rallying the subchieftains of the clan to one of her dinners. "Do we have to go, Kennion?"

"Oh, I think so."

"What does the line in Miss Owen's writing mean: 'To consider matters of mutual interest?'"

"It's one of the Grandante's touch dinners," he interpreted. "Might be the Working Girls' Aid or it might be Antivivisection or it might be some new pet charity she's taken up."

"Is that her way of raising money, by getting people at her table and then holding them up for it?"

Kennion sighed patiently. "Only when her regular collections fall short. Then she gets us together and expects us to make up the deficit. She always gives five times as much as any one else."

"She won't get a cent out of me," declared Fredericka, who was feeling prickly that morning.

Kennion shrugged his shoulders. "You won't have to give. I'll do it for both of us."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Jinky!" she cried in quick contrition. "I'm getting so that my nerves set edgewise whenever she comes up between us. Silly of me." She drank her coffee while he ran over the headlines in the paper. "How much more interesting the unprinted news of Habersham is than the printed," she mused aloud.

"True of every town, I expect," he grunted. "What have you got specially in mind?"

"The 'sitting' on Josephus."

"Who told you about that?" said he, in evident surprise.

"Wasn't I supposed to know even the fact? It's all that I do know. What happened?"

"Very little. They postponed any action. I can't understand Norval," he added reflectively.

"Norval's the easiest person in the world to understand, I should think," was her careless rejoinder. "Two plus two equals four: a straight line, the shortest distance between two points: all that sort of thing. That's the Grampian."

"Yes? Well, since you find him so simple, would you have expected him to defend Josephus?"

"Did he do that?" She showed swift animation. "On what ground?"

"That we know nothing positive against the girl, which is true enough, outside of her association with Josephus. Norval had one of his dumb, obstinate fits, the old Dutch

stuff; and Josephus had another. So the Grandante shifted to Elberta."

"What about Elberta?" Anxiety hardened the young wife's voice.

"Ransome Case is out."

"And his patents and processes?"

"He saved out two or three. But the most valuable aren't completed. They go to the Company."

"That's dirty work!" she cried hotly. "You didn't sit by without a protest and let her put that over, did you, Kennion?"

"What would have been the use?" he rejoined negligently. "It was in his contract. If he was fool enough to sign away his rights—"

"Because he was young and enthusiastic and easy! Sometimes I don't know which to hate the most, the Company or the collective Ruylands or your Aunt Augusta."

"Not much satisfaction in hating a soulless corporation, is there?" he returned with his easy smile. "What do you think Elberta will do now? They can't very well marry."

"If I were Elberta," said Fredericka furiously, "I'd go and live with him—they can't take her money away from her for that under the beastly Ruyland will—until I was twenty-eight or whatever the age is, and then marry him."

He gave her a queer look. "If you're trying to shock *me*, you're out of luck. I understand you gave her that wise counsel."

She cooled down immediately. "Only because I knew she wouldn't take it. Just one of my little bluffs."

"She would. She's been to Ransome and offered to do just that little thing."

"Kennion!" ejaculated Fredericka, aghast at finding her verbal chickens thus taking wing for far roosts.

"Ransome wouldn't have it," he pursued. "Said he might die, and then where would she be left? He's not so bad, you know, that chap, even if he is one of these beauty men."

"How do you know all this?"

"Elberta went to the Grandante and told her."

"I can't *believe* it! Elberta! Oh, what wouldn't I give to have been there and heard it!"

"Yes; I imagine the fur flew. The meek dove transformed into a tiger cat."

"Anyway, Mrs. Ruyland must see that it's all up on Josephus's side too."

"You don't know her. She counts on whipping him into line. They've tried to buck the Grandante before, but she always beats 'em to it and gets her own way in the end." There was a hint of depression in his tone.

"Because she's the best man of the lot. Christian Borck was right."

He returned to his paper, but presently emerged to ask with affected carelessness: "Freddy, has a mop-haired freak named Kearns been to see you?"

"Yes. Cissie Kearns. How did you know?"

"I thought likely she would. Anything to do with this?" He held up the paper to display an advertisement announcing a meeting on Wednesday evening to consider revision of existing laws on birth-control information.

She nodded. "Cissie's coming to luncheon to-morrow to talk it over. I ran across her as she was coming up from the train this morning."

"You weren't thinking of going to the meeting?" His manner was faintly quizzical.

"Why not?"

"For one thing, there ain't goin' to be no meetin'. The permit is to be revoked."

"If I know Cissie Kearns, there'll be a meeting, anyway."

"Then I advise you all the more to keep away, unless you want to spend the night in jail."

"She wouldn't dare!" burst out Fredericka, not taking the unnecessary trouble to fill in the gap in her inference.

"Well, you know how the Grandante feels about these things," said he.

Fredericka did know. To the childless old woman birth was a sacred thing because it constituted the only known method of perpetuating upon the surface of a necessitous earth those special virtues uniquely represented by the Ruylands.

"But how stupid of her!" raged the wife. "Does she think in this day and age that she can smother discussion of any subject she doesn't happen to like? First Borck because he wants to talk unionism, and now Cissie Kearns because she wants to say her say on birth-control legislation. Kennion, how does she think ideas are going to live without breathing space?"

"Ideas are the least of her troubles," he smiled. "She specializes on facts. The original pragmatist had nothing on her."

"I believe you sympathize with her!"

"I certainly don't sympathize with labor demagogues and sex ranters."

"Neither do I," she disclaimed. "But that doesn't prevent my being interested in what they've got to say. Your aunt wouldn't even listen to argument on the other side."

"Why should she? Her mind is all made up. It's been made up any time this fifty years."

"Walled up, you mean. Like a sepulcher. Let her keep it that way, if she likes it; but why should she prevent other people from hearing and knowing things that the whole intelligent world is discussing? Oh!" she cried fiercely, "it makes me feel as if I were being surrounded by an invisible vapor that by and by will choke me if I don't get clear of it. Kennion, can they really stop Cissie's meeting?"

"Certainly. Without a permit nobody can hold a public meeting in Habersham."

"But a private one; can that be held without a permit?"

"What's in your busy mind, Freddy?" he asked uneasily.

"Our garden. It's private enough, thanks to the high stone walls."

"You wouldn't do that, Freddy!"

"Do you forbid me, Kennion?"

"Of course not. When did I ever forbid you anything? But—"

"But what?"

"It'll be like waving a red rag—"

"Can't you understand that I'm in a red-rag mood over this? If you honestly are opposed on principle to free discussion of these things, I won't say another word."

He gave his half-foreign little shrug. "It would probably bore me to death. But as far as principle goes I'm not opposed to discussion of any darn thing."

"Then it's only because your Aunt Augusta—"

"Oh, Freddy! Why stir up a lot of unnecessary trouble?"

"Then I'm not allowed to tell Cissie that she can send out invitations for her meeting here?" she persisted.

"I didn't say that. What if the Grandante should find out?"

"She's the first one I'd send an invitation to."

"No, dear; I'm awfully afraid it wouldn't do."

"Tell me why it wouldn't do, Kennion."

"Well," he stopped, embarrassed, "if she knew of it in advance she might for— She might take steps— That leasehold, you know."

A crimson flame burned its way across her face. "I understand now," said she slowly. "Excuse me. I'd forgotten that I'm a woman with a husband but without a home."

Without a word he turned and went into the dining-room. She heard the key of the sideboard cupboard turn softly. A moment later the outside door closed. Fredericka Ruyland sat in a torpor of angered discouragement.

She was aroused by the mellifluous baritone of Carter in the hall.

"Mis' Ruylan' wish kin'ly to know will Mis' Kennion be so obligin' to come out."

"Yes, Carter," she answered, glad that it was a case of her going out and not of the other's coming in. She could hardly, at that moment, endure the thought of the Grandante in her house—which was not hers. Bare-headed she stepped into the chill sunshine where the pair of blacks were making a fine show of head-tossing at the curb.

"Get on your things, Fredericka," invited the caller, "and I'll drive you down for your marketing."

"I'm not ready to go yet," was the none too gracious reply.

"Then get them anyway and sit here with me. I've something to say to you."

The alternative was to take her into the house. Outwardly amenable but inwardly rebellious, Fredericka accepted the distasteful situation. "Well, what is it?" she asked.

"I don't think Kennion looks well."

"I hadn't noticed anything."

"You wouldn't, perhaps," retorted his great-aunt. "But I'm sure there's something. I do hope his queerish streak isn't coming back on him."

Fredericka became interested. "How, queerish?"

"Not like the rest of the family," was the response delivered with a sublime unconsciousness. "He wanted to be an artist once. I put the quietus on that," she added with a reminiscent and relishing grin. "Before he went to Europe I found a lot of his painting claptrap hidden away in his closet."

"What did you do with it?"

"Burned it."

Fredericka managed to keep her voice natural as she asked: "Did he know?"

"Certainly. I told him, and told him at the same time what would happen if he ever repeated the experiment. Daubing! That was the end of *that*."

"Perhaps it was the end of other things," said Fredericka half to herself; "things that hadn't even begun then."

The Grandante reverted to her original concern. "Something is certainly worrying him. You don't suppose he's got the artistic bee in his bonnet again, do you?"

"No such luck. I wish to God he had!"

"Why?" The old lady stared in scornful surprise.

"Because he'd be more the Kennion that I knew when I married him," retorted the wife. "Besides, it would give him some sort of outside interest in life."

"The mills are enough interest for any Ruyland," rebuked the head of the family. "But if it isn't the art foolishness, what is it?"

"You, I should think, if it's anything."

As a declaration of war, it fell flat. The frown on the clear old face was an expression not of resentment but of troubled rumination. "He's drinking too much, isn't he?"

"I haven't kept tabs on his drinks," was the flippant response.

"Several times when I've seen him," pursued the old lady, intent upon her trouble, "I thought that he'd been taking something even in business hours. He never did that before."

"Before he married me, you mean."

"Are you making him happy, Fredericka?" queried the Grandante with a hint of wistfulness.

"Is he making me happy? Did it ever occur to you to ask that?"

"He is devoted to you," returned Mrs. Ruyland in a tone that suggested a mild surprise that it should be so. "Certainly you can have no complaint of his conduct."

"No, of course not,"—listlessly.

"My dear Fredericka," continued Mrs. Ruyland with unwonted mildness, "I mean what I feel obliged to say to you kindly—"

"That's formula," interpolated the girl.

"Formula?" repeated the other, puzzled.

"Exactly. That's the formula people always use when they're going to say something they've no right to say."

"My affection for Kennion gives me the right," was the dignified correction. "That and my concern for the name of Ruyland which you bear."

"Has Kennion been talking to you about me?" There was a storm-vibration in the voice now.

"No, he has not. But I have made my own observations as to your conduct."

"What about my conduct? Straight talk, please, Mrs. Ruyland."

"I prefer it so. Young Enderby, then. His attentions to you are causing remark."

"Why not say my attentions to him?" Her smile was a taunt and a defiance.

"I need no help on choosing my own words," rejoined Augusta Ruyland tartly.

"Nor I in choosing my own friends."

"Friends?" The significant up-curve of the accentuation was farther than Augusta Ruyland had intended going. Her temper, too, was getting the better of her.

"Would you rather I said lovers?"

"*Fredericka!*"

"Don't call me *Fredericka!*" burst out the girl. She bit her lip savagely the moment she had said it; this was mere pettiness; it put her at a disadvantage.

"What else should I call Kennion's wife?" returned Mrs. Ruyland, scoring at once on her opponent's error.

"You're right. I'm sorry." She reflected for a moment. "We may as well have this out. If you've got in mind the flowers that he's been sending me—"

"Robert Enderby?" Mrs. Ruyland hoped that *Fredericka* had failed to note the start which accompanied the words. Was it possible that she did not know the source of the crimson roses? "Kennion's a fool not to take some stand," she continued hurriedly. "He has a mistaken sense of high-mindedness—"

"Which other members of his family don't share, unfortunately."

"If you think I have been prying into this Enderby affair, you are quite mistaken," disclaimed the old lady virtuously. "It wasn't necessary," she added. "His de-

votion is too obvious. You might at least suggest to him to be discreet."

"There has been no 'devotion,' as you call it," said Fredericka disdainfully. "Therefore there hasn't been any occasion for me to ask him to be discreet."

"Definitions might differ. For instance, the use of pet names toward the wife of another man—"

"Don't be absurd!" The wife's look and voice bespoke an untroubled conscience. "Bob Enderby doesn't call me pet names."

"At the Country Club dance last Saturday—where, by the way, you danced or sat out with him six times—"

"My congratulations on your Intelligence Department. Who reported that? Dawley Cole?"

"—when he bade you good night," went on the old lady immovably, "he called you Ricky."

"He always used to call me Ricky. Ever since we were children together."

"I understood," remarked the other slowly, "that that silly name was reserved exclusively for your mother."

The gust of wrath against Kennion which swept Fredericka's soul, contemptuous and not wholly justified, for the moment choked her utterance. When she recovered speech it was to say: "Is there *anything* that my husband doesn't tell you?"

"A great deal, since his marriage. Who knows how much he suffers in silence?" said the old lady, piously.

Anger died out of the girl's brain. "I don't want Kennion hurt," she said protectively. "You haven't told him about—about Bob's calling me Ricky, have you?"

"Not yet."

"That's a threat. Go on, then; tell him, if you want to make things more difficult for both of us. You can believe this or not; there hasn't been a thing between Bob Enderby and myself at any time since my marriage

that Kennion might not have heard or seen. Nor that anybody mightn't have heard and seen—even you."

Most unexpectedly Augusta Ruyland said: "I believe you. And I hope there never will be—for his sake as well as for yours and Kennion's. I quite like that young man."

"Go on, please. Why 'for his sake'?"

"This present reconstruction of the factory mechanical plan," explained the head of the Ruyland plant, "is the first important work that Enderby has had entrusted to him. In a way it might be said to be the foundation of his career. I wouldn't want to say that another couldn't take it up now, and carry it through, incidentally getting most of the credit. In fact that would be quite feasible without real impairment of the plan, if—well, if he should cease to be a desirable visitor here. But it would be most unfortunate for young Enderby, as you can appreciate."

Fredericka nodded. "I understand. You are trying to blackmail me into agreeing not to see Bob any more."

"There is no occasion to use insulting terms," said the Grandante loftily. "It would certainly be wiser to confine yourselves to formal and incidental association hereafter."

"Mrs. Ruyland," said Fredericka deliberately, "unless Kennion comes to me like a man and objects, giving good reason for his objections, I shall see Bob Enderby whenever I choose and as publicly or privately as I choose."

"Then I shall feel obliged to take the matter up with Kennion."

The girl turned to face her more directly. Her voice was as cool and even as a brook sparkling over clean stones as she inquired: "Would you like to see me leave Kennion for Robert Enderby?"

The old lady's face was a study in dismay. "You wouldn't do that!" she quavered.

"It's the only thing I would do. I wouldn't go on living with Kennion and cheat, even if I cared more for Bob than for him. You can be sure of that. And I do want to stick to Kennion," she added wistfully, "if only you will stop trying your best to make it impossible."

"I!" ejaculated the outraged Grandante. "I don't in the least understand you."

"You've never tried to. Yet you keep butting in on the most difficult and intimate parts of our lives. Can't you, for Heaven's sake, give us a chance to work this out for ourselves?"

"I am responsible for the good name and status of the family," began the old lady, but got no further, cut into as she was by the girl's indignant: "Who made you responsible?"

"God," was the prompt reply, delivered with an appalling simplicity and conviction.

Fredericka sat silent. What possible retort was there to this assertion of the divine right to rule?

The old lady was speaking again. "We will talk of this at some future time."

"No," she denied. "Not again. Not ever."

"When you have had time to think it over," concluded the arbitress of Ruyland destinies, unmoved. "To change the subject, a strange person claiming to be a friend of yours called on me yesterday."

"Cecilia Kearns?" Fredericka, who had made a move to leave the barouche, sat back again. Her companion opened a fat and ancient bag, wherefrom she extracted a card. "That is the name. She pretends to be"—she read from the card—"a traveling representative of the

Free Speech League. She is in reality a murderess. Her visit was for the purpose of interesting me in a birth-control meeting. She interested me," said the Grandante ominously.

"To the point of taking a ticket?" inquired the young wife, pretending not to understand.

"I shall not need a ticket. I suppose you have it in mind to go?"

Fredericka smiled. It was a deliberately provocative smile. Its implication was that Mrs. Ruyland had an incontrovertible right to suppose anything she might choose to suppose.

"Do you believe in these vile teachings?" demanded the old lady in a suppressed voice.

"How can I know whether they are vile or not? I haven't heard the arguments for or against them—yet."

"Don't palter with me! You know perfectly well that if these lessons are taught in a place like Habersham, half of our factory girls will be on the streets before they're done."

Fredericka stared at her, between curiosity and disgust. "Do you really believe that?"

"I do," declared the old lady, who believed less than half of it, but characteristically was being swept away by the exigencies of her own text. "I know it. I know them."

"You don't know them. You don't know anything about them. You don't know anything about human nature if you say that."

"Seventy-one years I have lived, girl and woman, in this world," the Grandante made solemn introductory pronouncement, only to have the cool voice of the girl break in:

"Oh, no, you haven't! Not in this world. On The Rock, where you've made a little private world of your

own, all made up of prejudices and worn-out traditions and false standards and petty arrogance. It's a rotten world. I'm glad I don't have to live in it."

Direct attack was just as likely to inspire the Grand-ante's respect as to stir her wrath. "We all live in little worlds of our own making," she pronounced sagely. "I'm doing my best to keep my world decent and straight."

This appealed to Fredericka's spirit of fairness, because it was true, as far as it went. "Probably you are," she granted. "Though I doubt whether you can keep people decent and straight by standing over them with a club every minute and telling 'em you'll beat 'em to a pulp if they're not good."

"It certainly can't be done by teaching them how to go wrong and not pay for it, as your precious Miss. Kearns wants to do." She concluded her sentence by applying to the free-speech representative an epithet of such Elizabethan force and simplicity that Fredericka jumped in her seat. Then she laughed.

"You're quite wrong there. Cissie is the most strait-laced of women in her personal conduct."

"Then why does she come here to corrupt our girls?" demanded the single-minded Augusta.

"Last thing in the world she'd want to do. Perhaps she believes that fear is a poor motive for keeping straight."

"It's the most powerful motive in the world."

"Of course, *you'd* believe that," murmured the girl thoughtfully. "That's your method of rule."

"How else could you rule, except by fear?" said the aged martinet simply.

Fredericka thought of Choral Three: how it was prospering under a system of communal interest and coöperation. Would it be possible ever to conduct a factory, an industrial entity, perhaps a city, on that basis? Not

while the Augusta Ruylands of the world had power to practice their efficient and benevolent-purposed despotism. "You know," she said, "this meeting isn't called to teach birth control. It's only to discuss the law against teaching. Put it, for argument—"

"I never argue," said the Grandante, who had been doing nothing else for half an hour, in her stiffest manner. "Let me tell you once and for all that anybody who attends that meeting takes all the risks, Ruyland or no Ruyland. Good morning, Fredericka."

The girl jumped lightly from the carriage. "I'll be there," she announced placidly. "What's more, I don't think I'll be the only Ruyland among those present."

The idea had come to her that she would make this occasion a test of Kennion's loyalty. A test? Hardly; that was perhaps too strong a word, for after all there was no decisive issue as between herself and Augusta Ruyland, to which she could expect him to commit himself. Rather it was an experiment to ascertain what could be expected of him in certain contingencies. She phoned Elberta Ruyland: would Elberta go with her to the meeting? Elberta, now ripe for any revolt, most certainly would. Who else was going?

"Norval," said Fredericka, as by sudden inspiration and quite without authorization. She enjoyed the incredulous and delighted gasp which came to her from the other end of the wire. It now remained to make good her prophecy. She stopped in at Factory Three, on her way to market, and laid the matter before its head. "Birth control!" said the startled Grampian. "Why, it isn't respectable."

"How dare you say anything isn't respectable that I'm going to?" returned Fredericka with assumed severity.

"You're not!"

"I am. So are you."

"No; I'm damned if I am," mumbled Norval, for the first time in his correct existence scandalized into swearing before a lady.

"Come on and get arrested, Norval," exhorted the mischievous Fredericka. "The Grandante is going to have the place pulled. I'd love to see her face when you're arraigned before the police court judge. *Don't* you think you could manage to look a little more like a lawless and disreputable character, old dear?"

"You mustn't go, Cousin Fredericka," twittered Norval in the accents of a febrile bird.

"Mustn't I? Watch me!"

The meeting of the Free Speech League "to discuss the repeal of the law forbidding the dissemination of birth control information" was a melancholy anticlimax. A scant and scattered audience listened apathetically to the introductory remarks, after which the police entered, stopped the proceedings and arrested those on the platform, including Fredericka and Elberta, without fuss or turmoil. Fredericka felt that it was a peculiarly inglorious martyrdom. Furthermore, she wished that Cissie Kearns had not tried to hit the officer with the ice pitcher. The blow was quite inexpert and served only to soak one side of the poor man in cold water, so that he sniffled dismally when he arraigned his prisoner at headquarters. There the official in charge was horrified that two Ruylands, ladies at that, were among the catch. Never before in the history of Habersham had a female Ruyland been subjected to the indignity of arrest. Greatly perturbed, he forbore to send them to the cells, whither Miss Kearns had already been led triumphantly denouncing the oppressions of unrighteous power, and was about

to telephone The Rock for instructions, when Norval Ruyland appeared and relieved his troubles by offering to go bail for them.

"No, thank you," said Fredericka. "But how did you know?"

"I was there," admitted the shamefaced Grampian.

"Where? I didn't see you."

"You couldn't. I was in the gallery. I made inquiries and—and learned something which led me to believe that I might be of use."

"So you can. Phone Kennion for me."

Kennion came. He bailed out the two girls. Fredericka mildly suggested that he do the same for Cissie Kearns, but to this he returned a flat refusal.

"Then I don't leave this station," averred Fredericka sweetly.

"Neither do I," subscribed Elberta.

"Take 'em away," besought the desk official in an agonized whisper.

"I'll bail out Miss Kearns," offered Norval, with the expression of a child who has just tasted its first olive.

"You're a dear," stated Fredericka; "but I think my husband ought to do it."

Her husband maintained an obdurate silence. Norval conferred with the officer, and word was sent to the cells, whence came immediately Miss Kearns's reply. She declined absolutely to be bailed out.

Kennion and Fredericka took Elberta home, and returned to the squat house on the corner. Kennion was silent and depressed. He made no reply when Fredericka with forced gayety attainted him of grouchiness. Indeed, he hardly responded to her good night.

Cecilia Kearns spent the night in a cell, rejoicing. She was of those who fully appreciate the propaganda value of persecution. In the morning she was discharged with

a solemn injunction on the part of the magistrate to go and sin no more, to which she replied, disconcertingly, that she'd be back next month. At the hearing Fredericka learned that, just before midnight, Augusta Ruyland had sent her lawyer to secure the release of the two arrested bearers of the name.

She had been unable to support the thought of a Ruyland being pent behind prison bars in the home of the Ruylands.

CHAPTER TWENTY

BUT for her husband's insistence, Fredericka would have found some excuse for staying away from the "to consider" dinner. Once there, however, she was agreeably disappointed, for the occasion was a success. Twenty-four assorted Ruylands were present. Josephus was not there, having been excluded as a mark of coming disgrace. Neither was Elberta. That mutinous spirit had refused without rime or reason to go, and had been supposititiously confined to her room (at twenty-two years of age!) by an irate and bewildered father. Actually she was out and off to the movies with Ransome Case. But the shy Selah B. had been for once lured from his conservatories and placed next to Fredericka, who found him an unexpectedly diverting companion. On her other side was Norval.

The Grandante was at her best. Witty by natural equipment, she had to-night a subtle control of her social environment, which sometimes comes like the inspired and fugitive endowment of an hour. The ponderous Ruyland gathering flashed sparks of response to her. Even Calvert Ruyland-Marsh boomed out a well-pointed story which was not more than six months old when Fredericka had heard it on the occasion of her latest visit to New York. With the coffee, accompanied by the ancient Mission apricot brandy from California, appeared Miss Owen, bearing a sheaf of pamphlets and papers, and disappeared.

"I think," pronounced Selah B. in Fredericka's ear, "that we're in for an attack of anti-vaccination."

"Is that one of the Grandante's specialties?"

"It is. One of her worst. Once in the dear, dead days beyond recall, as we used to sing when I was in college, a fourth-assistant Ruyland cousin was vaccinated on the leg and the leg fell off or something. Since then the Powerful Augusta has been a rabid anti-vaccinationist, and has used her influence to keep vaccination out of the schools. In consequence our Habersham smallpox rate is the wonder if not the admiration of hygienists everywhere."

"Is it anti-vaccination?" said Norval, on the other side of her, anxiously. "Lord preserve us!"

"Why the low moan, my Grampian?" queried Fredericka gayly.

"I cut my contribution to almost nothing this year," explained Norval.

"I didn't give a red cent," said Selah B. "Never do. Don't believe in the nonsense."

"Neither do I," said Norval.

"Then why give up?" inquired Fredericka.

"Less trouble than to get into a jangle with the Grandante," he sighed.

"I've a lurking idea that we'd better drink our liqueurs while our souls are still unruffled, Norval," suggested Selah B. "What think?"

Norval took a swallow, looked at Fredericka. "Oh, I don't care," he asserted recklessly, and was rewarded with a warming smile.

Commanding silence with her glance, the Grandante began. She spoke quietly and well, cited with simple faith the statistics provided by some anonymous master-juggler in the central organization; argued forcefully for "freedom from the medical despotism of cow-poison," and announced that she would ask those present to make up the deficit in the year's budget.

"John, I have put you down for fifty dollars," said she, referring to her list.

"Quite right, Sister Augusta."

"Calvert, the same."

"Happy to be privileged, Cousin Augusta," boomed the important Calvert.

"Kennion, my boy; twenty-five dollars?"

"Fifty for Fredericka and myself, Aunt Augusta," returned Kennion quickly, and won a smile of appreciation from the Grandante not reflected in his wife's visage.

"Peter W., 3d; seventy-five?"

"Mump!" said Peter W., 3d, in imminent peril of losing his tongueful of cordial, which dubious response was accepted as satisfactory.

She completed the round, nicely adjusting the demand upon each one, to his or her known income, until only Selah B. and Norval were left. At the call of his name the former said:

"Nothing."

"Do I understand that you decline to make any contribution to this cause?"

"Your understanding is undimmed by age, Augusta," he replied, smiling.

"I have invited you to my house," said the Grandante in her most Grandantic manner, "on the assumption that, being one of the family, you would be interested—"

"One moment, if you please." Selah B. rose with his pleasant smile still untainted. "I have enjoyed your dinner vastly. It would be impossible as well as ungracious to express the value of the delightful companionship"—here he bowed with old-time courtesy to the Grandante, then pointedly to Fredericka, and finally to Mary Hale Ruyland, who sat on his other side with a face of permanent wood—"in money terms; but I estimate the delicious viands and wines at approximately

twenty dollars. I should be charmed to leave my check for that amount as I pass out, to be applied to your fund."

Through the appalled silence Fredericka heard her own delighted chuckle break with an effect of completely shattering the proprieties. The hostess's look paused for one murderous moment upon her on its way around the table, daring any other to similar offense, coming to rest finally upon Selah B.

"Sit down," she snapped, "and don't play the fool."

"Ah, that's better," murmured the recalcitrant, and resumed his seat.

Accrued acerbity was in her tone as she now addressed the victim reserved for final sacrifice. "Norval, I have you down for two hundred and fifty dollars."

The bulk of the Grampian jerked in its chair. "Not two hundred and fifty," he protested, looking down at the table before him with a glassy eye.

"Why not?" was the peremptory demand.

"Need we discuss it here—before the whole family?"

"It is a family matter. If the Ruylands fail to support public-spirited enterprises in Habersham, who will do it?"

"If you put it that way," mumbled the wretched Norval, "I suppose—" He was hesitating, groping, on the verge of capitulation. A smile appeared on Augusta Ruyland's expressive face. Fredericka saw it, hated it, dropped her hand with swift resolve beneath the table, and fastened her strong, slender fingers upon Norval's drooping wrist, signaling courage, resistance, revolt. "No," said he in altered tones, and met the look of angered astonishment in the Grandante's eyes with a flickering glance. "I set aside so much every year out of my income for charity, as you know. My quota has already been exhausted by—er—special demands."

"Choral Three?" queried the collector of funds shrewdly.

"Principally," he admitted.

"I shall remember that," remarked the Grandante. "Are there other—ah—contributions of a less public nature which would explain your parsimony?"

(What could she mean? thought Fredericka. What lay behind the cold venom of the hint? And, musing on this, she did not at once take in the full significance of the next words, directed to Selah B.)

"Selah, what are crimson roses worth in the New York market?"

"Really I don't know," said the surprised amateur florist. "I don't sell, you know."

"But you must have some idea," persisted the chill voice, now driving like a wedge its astounding revelation into the girl's brain. She darted a sidelong look at Norval. He was ghastly.

"Oh, well, Meteors, I should think anywhere from ten to eighteen dollars a dozen, depending on the season."

"Is that substantially correct, Norval?"

Gurgling, melancholious sounds emerged from Norval's throat, which exhibited a movement like that of a pump failing to suck. No help from Norval! Fredericka gathered herself in a brave effort to save the situation and was proud of the cheerful nonchalance with which she enunciated her defensive and, as she thought, ingenious fiction.

"Oh, you've heard about our bet?" she lied loyally. "Norval bet me the roses that Choral Three would flivver in New York—"

"Then why," came Augusta Ruyland's challenge, shearing through the thin tissue of falsity, "did you think young Enderby sent them?"

Fredericka turned scarlet. She disliked lying at best,

but she hated an inept lie. And she was surprisedly conscious of a sharp disappointment, evoked by the mention of the name, that Robert Enderby was not the giver.

"No; it was not a bet." The pump in Norval's throat had begun to "draw" again. "I thank you, Cousin Fredericka; but I would rather it was understood clearly. This was entirely my own doing. Cousin Fredericka knew nothing about it. I overheard her say once that she lo—she liked red roses about her. When I went to New York I—it occurred to me—I happened to be passing a florist's—I sent them. That's all," he pleaded in hoarse desperation. "It's all my fault and nobody else's."

During this sorry explanation the subject and silent partner of it kept thinking: "Oh, the fool! The poor, helpless, blundering, dear fool! Can't he *see* what he's doing?"

Had he shouted aloud "I love this woman; love her hopelessly, absurdly, completely," the betrayal could have been no more final. After that it seemed dim anticlimax to hear the Grandante announce:

"We may then regard the business of the fund as concluded. Shall we go up to the drawing-room?"

Clan Ruyland rose with a rustle. There was a general movement toward the two doors. Halfway to the nearest one, Fredericka discovered that she was walking alone. She turned. Selah B. was standing with a disturbed expression on his face, looking back at Norval, who still sat slumped in his chair. A sick fear mingled in the girl's brain with the anger and pity she felt toward him. Had he had a stroke? That would be the culminating absurdity and disaster. She saw Mahlon, a small, slim Ruyland with an immovable Chinese type of face, come across to him rapidly, set a hand on his shoulder, coax him to his feet. There was something queerly tender about the little man's helpfulness. Forcing herself against

a strong disinclination, Fredericka went back, and caught Norval's arm on the other side.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

He lifted hopeless eyes to her. "Do you hate me?"

There was a fine courage in her smile. "Don't be silly, Norval. You'd better go home."

"And leave you to face them alone?"

Selah B. stepped up. "She won't have to face them alone," he said. "Trot along, Norval. Mahlon will go with you."

As they left, the old bachelor turned to the young wife. "By God!" said he with intense conviction. "If I had found a woman like you in time, my branch of the Ruylands wouldn't be dying out." He lapsed into a moody silence, emerging to say with a sigh: "I thought I had once, and only once. But she couldn't see it."

All the music of Fredericka's voice was attuned to sympathy as she asked: "Who was she, Cousin Selah?"

"Augusta Ruyland," he answered.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

FACTORY THREE was in a pother. Its guiding genius had failed to appear in his accustomed place at the appointed morning hour. Such a thing had not occurred thrice within the memory of the oldest employee. Norval Ruyland was of that iron-bound type to which vacations are a silly luxury and casual absentings, inexcusable dissipations. As he shared the characteristic Ruyland limitation of inability to delegate authority, the human mechanism of the plant began to clack and grind. By the end of a fortnight it was extensively deranged.

The stentorian Calvert Ruyland-Marsh was detached temporarily from his petty but highly paid sinecure and sent to take Norval's place, where, to the general surprise, including that of the Grandante, he soon succeeded in restoring at least the outward appearance of orderly procedure. But all Ruylands, reflected the gratified chieftainness of the clan, possessed executive potentialities, however submerged or apparently atrophied by disuse; it was in the strong, old blood.

Artfully disseminated rumors that Norval had gone to the Pacific Coast on a secret and important mission gained universal currency, but no credence whatsoever. In an interpenetrative organization such as the Ruyland cosmos, facts, however guarded, inevitably seep into the general circulation, where they grow and distort as they travel. That Augusta Ruyland and Norval had had some sort of "row" was authentically known throughout the various plants within two days, and was the main, almost the exclusive, subject of shop talk in Factory Three.

The cause and extent of the trouble was matter of infinite debate. One story had it that Norval, having indulged too liberally in the vintage Burgundy for which The Rock was famous, had contradicted his aunt on a matter of family tradition and, after being rebuked, had openly defied her injunction of silence, whereupon his insurgency was quelled by a carafe in the hands of that capable lady. It was deemed to be quite within the bounds of her capacity and even of her proper rights as the head of the clan. The oldest workmen recalled the stirring picture of the young Augusta, unafraid above the mob, in the smoke of her own revolver; she had always been a woman of action. Gossip-spreaders with a taste for romantic embroidery had supplied an appendix to the effect that, in his shame and contrition, Norval had burst a blood vessel, had sunk, foaming at the mouth before her feet, and had been secretly removed to a hospital where he was now slowly and none too surely recuperating.

Wider adherence was gained by the theory that the conflict at The Rock was only the outburst of a fire which had long been creeping. Norval and the Grandante, ran this account, had differed upon questions of shop policy and Norval had been forced out of the Company and had departed from Habersham never to return. Then some ingenious spirit hit upon a concrete hypothesis: the Grandante in issuing the embargo upon Christian Borck's projected meeting of protest had gone over Norval's head, and he had resented the usurpation. Night after night, it was known, the announcement of forbiddance promulgated by Augusta Ruyland had been torn from the bulletin board of Factory Three, until a permanent watch was set upon it. Night after night Norval Ruyland was reputed to have been in his office, working over the plans of the Choral Three club house. What more reasonable than to suppose him the agency of re-

moval? In the belief of the leaders of opinion among the working force, this was the real reason for the split. Still another faction held to the notion that the summary discharge of Della Carpenter and Norval's defense of Josephus in that matter were at the root of the quarrel. It must be credited to the instinctive solidarity of the Ruyland clan that no leakage of Fredericka's connection with the split came out of that catastrophic dinner. Bearing the Ruyland name, she was protected by a walled silence of loyalty.

One letter came to Fredericka from Norval. It was brief and businesslike, with no personal note. He was tied up with personal affairs of importance and complication in New York. How long these might keep him he was unable to state. He would return for the formal opening of the club three weeks hence, if not before. Would she kindly see to it personally that the enclosed items were put through at once? And he was "Very truly, Norval Ruyland."

Fredericka showed the letter to Kennion. Kennion smiled his slightly awry smile. "Poor old Norval!" said he.

On his busy rounds through New England, Christian Borck was keeping in touch with Habersham events while biding his time. Learning of the strange facts of Norval's absence, and hearing the explanation which ascribed it to differences over the placarding of Factory Three, he believed the latter largely because of his sincere desire to believe. Events seemed to be playing into his hands rather sooner than he had anticipated. He wired Daniel Selover (in prearranged cipher, for Borck wasn't risking any underestimate of the ramifications of the Ruyland power and command of informative sources) to make preliminary arrangements for a meeting. He would be present and take charge. Within a week, fresh placards

were out; the streets of Habersham were strewn with dodgers; Christian Borck, the well-known union organizer, would address the proletariat of Habersham upon the local suppression of free speech and free convocation—Mr. Borck had been in communication with Miss Cecilia Kearns—with special invitation to employees of the Ruyland Paper Company to attend.

Factory Three took special interest in discussing the coming meeting. Who would dare to go in open or secret defiance of the Company's (for which read the Grandante's) orders was made the subject of debate and bets. Choral Three club house, now sufficiently advanced for part use, though not formally opened, was the scene of many an impromptu gathering in which the insurgent element strove to whip up the sympathy of the more torpid spirits to the point of supporting the revolt. Once so many got together in the parlor that an adjournment was taken to the concert hall, and a scratch meeting was held on the unfinished stage. Twenty-four hours later Fredericka, stopping in to decide upon the shade of some draperies, found a group about the club bulletin board upon which was a typed notice forbidding the use of the building or any part of it for any meetings other than those having to do with the affairs of Choral Three.

Fredericka made her way through the gathering, read the announcement, pulled it down, and tore it lengthwise and breadthwise amidst excited applause.

The response from Augusta Ruyland to this action came one day later, through Kennion. "What have you been doing to the Grandante now?" he demanded with some impatience.

Fredericka told him the episode of the notice. He laughed. "A bit theatrical on your part, wasn't it? But I don't know that I blame you much. I wish you'd

keep out of these things, though. She wants you to come up to The Rock this afternoon."

"Suppose I don't go?"

He shrugged. "Then she'll come here. So you might as well."

"There it is! Any Ruyland 'might as well' when the Grandante crooks her finger. Very well; I'll go."

Kennion looked at her suspiciously. "Why are you so compliant all of a sudden, Freddy?"

"Policy," was the prompt reply. "Norval isn't here to look after things, so I'm going to do what I think he'd want done. I don't intend to stand by and see Factory Three and Choral Three involved in a big row without lifting a hand."

"What can you do?" There was just the faintest emphasis on the pronoun. "You don't expect to talk the Grandante over, do you?"

"I'm going to have a try at it."

The attempt was as futile as Kennion, in the wisdom of his experience, had indicated. Primed with argument, both logical and persuasive, and prepared to set forth in full Christian Borck's theory of the grievance as an incentive to unionization, Fredericka opened up her plea as soon as she arrived at The Rock, only to be cut short by the curt pronouncement:

"If my workmen have anything to say to me, they know they can always get a fair hearing."

"Then, if I bring a delegation from Factory Three—"

"Are you employed by the Ruyland Paper Company?"

"No, of course not; but—"

"If my workmen," repeated Augusta Ruyland, and went through the formula to the end.

"What did you send for me for?" asked Fredericka sulkily.

"A Company announcement has been removed from the Choral Three club house."

"The club house is private property. No outside announcement has any right there without permission of the committee."

Augusta Ruyland calmly ignored this. "It must not happen again."

"I took that notice down myself, Mrs. Ruyland."

"I'm perfectly aware of that. It must not happen again."

"Will you give me a chance to explain our position?" Fredericka, out of loyalty to the absent Norval's interests, was striving mightily for patience.

"It would be useless. And, in any case, I have not the time now."

"I don't believe you realize how deeply stirred the Factory Three people are," warned the girl.

"It fails to interest me," returned the lofty Grandante. "If you will excuse me now, the family conference is waiting for me."

"The 'sitting on' Josephus," thought the girl, as she left. "And *that* is of more importance than the rights of the Ruyland employees!"

The Grandante went leisurely down to the dining-room. The family representatives, most of whom had already come, rose and stood until she was seated. A general air of uneasiness, of wishing to be done with the unpleasant business and get away, was prevalent. Only the Grandante seemed quite at ease. She enjoyed these rare sessions of discipline; they gave assertion to her authority. A sense of power, placid and assured, emanated from her.

Like a traitor conducted to his impeachment, the erring Josephus entered last, his eyes obstinately lowered, his shoulders, bulky as those of a young bull, humped for-

ward. When he dropped into his chair, without greeting to any, a tremor shook the floor.

"Sulks," said Calvert Ruyland-Marsh severely.

"Tut-tut," John Ruyland admonished the culprit. For John, this was an almost violent affirmation of moral attitude.

"Good afternoon, Josephus," said the Grandante.

Josephus muttered something beneath his breath. The Grandante rose; the regular program began with this assumption of the floor. She would state the case, the accused would then have his opportunity to explain, excuse, or palliate his offense; that he might deny it was unthinkable; two or three other Ruylands would suitably express their distress and reprehension, after which he would be bidden to retire, and Augusta Ruyland would pronounce the clan judgment in which the rest would concur. Josephus knew what was coming. He had been through it part way before: he had no desire to repeat the experience.

"As the main facts of this regrettable occurrence," began Augusta Ruyland with relish, "have been presented before, I need only say now—"

"Needn't say anything." Josephus's resonant bass overbore the thinner tones.

The assemblage of Ruylands turned their heads as if worked on a single lever to the source of this heretical interruption. Kennion laid a hand on the culprit's arm. "Wait your turn, Joe," he cautioned.

Josephus's countenance remained lowered, his blunt chin pressing into his chest. "Go home," he mumbled thickly. "Go home, all of you!"

"Josephus!" The Grandante's imperative rebuke crackled as electricity crackles in a surcharged element.

He shook his head, bull-like. "What's it all matter?" he said. "She's married. Della's married. Yesterday."

A cackle of prickly laughter from Peter W., 3d, heightened the tension.

"Best thing that could happen, undoubtedly," contributed somebody.

"It is fortunate for her," said the Grandante, "that she could find some complaisant fool to marry her—"

"She's as decent a woman as you are." The horrifying words seemed to emanate from the pit of Josephus's contracted waistcoat.

"Leave the room, sir!" boomed Calvert Ruyland-Marsh. "Leave it at once." And he looked about him with the leonine air of one whose courage has risen to the precise and appropriate act demanded by an emergency.

"Tut-tut," said John.

"That boy is suffering," whispered Mahlon, approaching his parchmented face close to Kennion's ear.

Augusta Ruyland's knuckles struck the table with the impact of a gavel. "Silence, if you please." To Josephus she said contemptuously: "You're drunk."

He stood up with an effort, and with a greater effort gathered and strengthened his faculties. "I may be drunk," he admitted in the passionless flow of his deep bass. "Been drinking since yesterday. Why wouldn't I? But I'm not so drunk that I can't talk straight talk. This is your doings, Aunt Augusta." His shaking hand steadied as he lifted it to point to the head of the table. "If it hadn't been for you, she'd have married me."

"Very likely, and glad to get the chance. The daughter of a common workman!" said she with infinite disgust.

"That's all right. I wanted her. But she was too afraid of you. They're all afraid of you—you old devil."

"Here! Here!" Calvert strode forward, took the speaker by the shoulder, that shoulder of a young bull.

Without special violence, without even diverting his gaze from the head of the table, the bulky Josephus set hand upon the breast of the interrupter. Calvert plunged backward as if an explosion had propelled him, whirled over the chair that fell before him, rolled, and in the paralytic silence of the clan, pulled himself to his feet, and stood, weaving, with his hand to his head.

"Sorry," muttered Josephus. "Didn't mean to hurt you. What was I saying?"

"You were calling me an old devil," answered Augusta Ruyland evenly.

"Was I? Yes; I was. They're all afraid of you," he resumed his indictment. "The whole family. Got 'em all bluffed. I'm not afraid of you. Nothin' to be afraid of any more. Don't care."

"Are you done?" came the incisive voice as he paused.

"No, I'm not." He shook his great head. "I've got some more to say to you. You're always buttin' in. You butted in on Elberta; look what's come of that. You butted in on Norval. Where's Norval? You're buttin' in on Kennion and Fredericka—"

"Leave us out of it," hastily broke in Kennion.

"All right. You're a good feller, Kennion. But she'll get you yet." He put his hand to his forehead wearily. "You interrupted me," he complained. "What was I— Oh, yes! She butts in. She messes up people's lives. Messes 'em up. Won't leave 'em alone. Ruylands, too. What's a Ruyland?"

"Are you *quite* done, Josephus?"

The repeated challenge cleared his brain. "Almost. You can't do anything more to me, Aunt Augusta. You've gummed my game, all right. I'm through. I resign. I've sold my stock in the Company, and—"

Every man in the room was on his feet. Stock in the Ruyland Paper Company sold? Perhaps to an out-

sider! A precedent as old as the family shattered. The first break in the dike. In a clamor of voices the multi-form question filled the air around him. To whom had the stock been sold?

"Find out," said he contemptuously. "I'm out of it. And you can all go to hell," he concluded in his lifeless voice.

He looked about him uncertainly. A great bowl of the precious blue Venetian glass, surrounded by goblets of the same ware, stood in the center of the table. With as quiet an absence of effort as that with which he had overwhelmed Calvert, he lifted high the glowing globe and brought it down, shattered to a thousand facets of brilliance amid the fragments of its companion pieces. A curved edge, like a glittering scimitar, sheared deep into one palm. He lifted his hand, stared stupidly at it, wrung it, flicked away the gush of crimson that broadened across the surface. It flew in a shower of drops. A wide splotch of it smeared the cheek of the Grandante. Not one woman in a thousand can endure the sudden touch of blood. Augusta Ruyland did not start; did not even lift her hand to the warm stain.

"You may go, Josephus," said she, with a voice as level in control as if this were a regular dismissal in procedure.

He took it so, shambled out of the room. The clan sat, stricken into silence. Drama had invaded that semi-sacred function, sheer, raw, indecorous, indecent drama. The shock left them at a loss. They stared helplessly at the red-flecked table, with the shatter of gleaming angles in the center.

"We will continue our consideration of the case," said Augusta Ruyland.

Taking a fine lace handkerchief from her chatelaine, she daintily wiped the blood of Josephus Ruyland from her face.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"COME back," wrote Fredericka to Norval. "Things cannot stand as they are. We must have a talk, you and I. Kennion too, I think. And we need you at Choral Three. There is a prospect of big trouble there, and bigger trouble in Factory Three. You ought to be here on the ground. Wire or phone me when you will come."

Norval came at her call. Whatever fear or expectation Fredericka may have entertained of finding him changed by the devastating experience at The Rock was dissipated by the first sight of him. He was the same solemn, lusterless personality. Fredericka could have laughed and choked over her laughter when she perceived that he could not meet her eyes. He was so pathetically like an abashed schoolboy, as he sat in her library with his pudgy hands lopping over the arms of his chair.

"Have you seen the Grandante yet?" asked Fredericka.

"No. I came here direct."

"When are you going to The Rock?"

"Has she sent for me?"

"Not that I know of."

"Why should I go, then?"

"To show that you're not afraid of her." He blinked. His hands opened and closed once. "At least, to pretend that you're not afraid of her," she amended, a flash of impatience sharpening her speech.

"I'll go. To-morrow. If you think I ought to," he said brokenly.

"Oh, Norval!" cried the girl. "Don't take this thing

so much to heart. It's all such a wild absurdity, anyway; the sort of thing that couldn't happen anywhere but right here in Habersham. I'm going to pretend it's a fairy tale," she continued resolutely, intent upon dispelling the gloom wherein he was submerged. "The enchanted castle on The Rock, and the gathering of the spellbound pilgrims, dragged to the feast of hell-broth by chains forged out of spider webs, and the old she-witch presiding; and then—cock-a-doodle-doo!—in comes the dawn light through the windows and the whole black spell melts away. All we need," she chattered on, "is the roosterous spell-breaker. Couldn't you teach one of your falcons to crow, Norval? Oh, I forgot. The witch banished them, too, didn't she? Poor Norval!"

"I wouldn't care," said he, gloomily unresponsive to her playful experiment, "as far as I am concerned. But I've made trouble for you. That's what I can't bear to think of."

"Then don't think of it. It isn't true, anyway. I made trouble for myself by ever coming to Habersham. Heaps of it! And I'm rather enjoying it," she boasted.

His head waggled in loose-jointed negation, grotesquely like the motion of an Oriental toy idol. "You don't know that woman," he muttered. "You don't know what she mightn't do to you."

Fredericka flushed. "Pooh! That's superstition. You've all kowtowed to her till you've come to believe in a power that doesn't exist. Her strength is that you're afraid of her. If you would stand up to her once!"

"It's been tried," said he, and let it go unfinished. The lack of conclusion was grim. "Is Kennion here?" he asked timidly. "You wrote something about—I understood that—"

"Kennion has gone to the club. He said that this was my funeral and he wouldn't interfere. He's right,

I suppose. But it doesn't make it any easier. Norval, I've got to stop coming to Factory Three."

"Why?"

"Kennion doesn't want me to." She paused and added deliberately: "I think he's jealous—a little."

Norval's dull eyes twitched. "Of *me*?"

"In a way. Could anything be more absurd!" She was speaking purposefully now, pointing her necessary cruelty so that it might go unerringly to its mark. "It's too poisonously silly, isn't it?"

She had risen from her chair and taken a restless, aimless step or two toward the window. Thus there was left the open space of a few yards between him and the long, gilt-set mirror in the end wall. When he lifted his head it was to confront his own image. He looked long and silently at that presentment before answering, without bitterness, without emphasis, with nothing in his voice but still acceptance.

"It is."

He smiled. At the desolation of that smile, a furious surge of tears choked the girl. "Oh, Norval! How could you do it!" she attacked him vehemently. "How could you have been such a fool! To spoil everything between us. To make it all impossible! It's—it's so needlessly idiotic of you."

"I know."

"It was my fault, too," she accused herself. "I ought to have seen. I *did* see; but I wouldn't admit it to myself. How was I to realize that—that—" There was no end to that query other than the savage implication that so grotesque a being as he could not reasonably be suspected of daring to fall in love.

He concluded it for her, with unexpected gentleness: "The gnome and the fairy. But you'd never have known if Aunt Augusta hadn't traced the flowers."

"The Grandante again! How I've loved the roses!" She flushed a little as she recalled that it wasn't because he had sent them. "There mustn't be any more of them, Norval," she added.

"It was the only thing I could do for you," he answered sorrowfully. "And now I can't even do that?"

"Never! As long as you live."

"Never—as long as I live," he repeated in a doleful whisper.

"It isn't the only thing you've done for me, either," she pursued with a warmth that brought a tinge of color to his pasty cheeks. "You've done—lots." It was a feeble recognition. But she did not know how to specify. She compensated for it by adding: "You're the best friend I've got in Habersham, Norval. And now that's got to stop."

"Because Kennion—" he began, but she interjected:

"I wasn't fair to Kennion in saying that he's jealous of you. He's jealous of my reputation. There's been so much talk since the dinner, among the Ruylands. There would be, you know. Snake-tongues!"

"The Grandante?"

"No. That's the queer part of it. I can't find out that she's ever mentioned it to any one, or let any one talk to her about it since."

"Yes; that's Aunt Augusta all through. She does a thing, right or wrong, and is finished with it. There's an old legend about a falcon that never struck twice at its quarry. If the first stroke didn't kill, it gave the quarry its life. But it seldom failed of the first. She's like that."

"She's come between *us* effectually," said the girl. "Just at the time when I need you—your friendship—most. Perhaps that's why she did it."

"Can't I see you any more?"

"Of course. Incidentally, as we'd meet anyway. But I've got to stop coming to the factory and worrying you into indigestion while you're eating your honest-workingman's lunch off your neat and orderly desk. Oh, Norval, I did want to be with you when the fight in Choral Three busts."

Across his inexpressive features passed a look of fright. "You're not going to get out of Choral Three, Cousin Fredericka?"

"What else can I do? It's all bound in together with you."

His voice sank to a dull monotone. "That was my monument to you. I planned it and carried it through for you, because you wanted it, and because I wanted to keep you tied up to Factory Three. If you quit, what is there left to go on for?"

"Everything! To give it up now would be a betrayal of all your Factory Three people. They've put their money and their hopes into the thing. You can't do that, Norval."

"I don't care," he returned soddently. "I just don't care."

"It would be a betrayal of me, too, then," she cried. "Can't you see that?"

"How can it go on without you? You're the fire and the light and the spirit of it."

"Then I won't get out!" she declared with passion. "Not for all the Ruylands in the world. Let them talk. I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm doing the rightest thing I've tried to do since I came to this place, and I'm going to go on doing it. So that's that, Norval."

"Thank you," said he. It was quietly spoken. But she did not quite dare to look at him. She had the fear of seeing an expression on his face that she could not bear to see.

"Now," said she, making her tone deliberately practical, "we'll come down to business, which means trouble, which means the Grandante. She's begun to raise the devil with Choral Three."

"Already?"

"What would you expect! You run away and leave me to cope with a situation I know so little about."

"You think I ought not to have gone. Perhaps I oughtn't," he sighed.

"Oh, do brace up! Be a stout and stalwart Grampian. 'My strength is in the hills,' and all that sort of thing. This is a fight."

"With Aunt Augusta?"

"Naturally. Who else would it be?" She detailed the episode of the bulletin. "I tore it down. With my own fair hands. Oh, very motion-picturesque!"

Discomposure was in his face. "You oughtn't to have done that."

"Oughtn't! What would you have had me do? Let her put that over on us? That's *our* club, not hers. She isn't even on the board."

"No. There we made our mistake. Aunt Augusta has always been on the board of every Ruyland enterprise. She expects it."

The vivid beauty of the girl's face set in lines of doggedness. "This isn't a Ruyland enterprise. It's a Factory Three concern exclusively. Suppose we *had* elected her to the board, what would she do but make trouble?"

"Make trouble anyway," he muttered, and enlarged the matter into something about using the telephone as he rose and plodded out into the hall. When he returned he did not resume his seat, but stood staring down at her in apprehensive speculation.

"Anything important?" she questioned, forcing herself to lightness of tone.

"The notice is back on the board."

She sprang to her feet, ran into the hall, came back adjusting her hat with savage jerks.

"Where are you going?" he asked superfluously.

"To Choral Three. Will you come?"

"It's no use, Cousin Fredericka."

"Then you're not with me. Are you against me? Are you with her?"

"It's no use, I tell you," he repeated. "If you tear down that bulletin, she'll have another put up. Like Factory Three."

"Will she?" He had never before heard that luring voice of hers tuned to such a pitch. "I'll put up a cot and sleep under the notice-board if necessary, to see that she doesn't."

"It's no—"

"If you tell me again that it's no use I'll—I don't know *what* I'll do!"

"Sit down, Cousin Fredericka," he pleaded, resuming his own seat. "There is something I want to explain to you."

"Explain it quickly, then," was the uncompromising retort. "I'll take it standing."

"The site that the club house stands on," he began, "was, as you know, donated."

"By you," she assented impatiently. "Well?"

"Not by me, exactly. I put the deal through. But it is really a Company leasehold."

At the word "leasehold" with its rodent memories, all the color ebbed out of the girl's face. She made two steps toward Norval, darted out her hand, clutched him by the shoulder, shook, with a strength unbelievable in her slight figure, the ponderous form in the chair.

"Go on," she said hoarsely. "What does that mean?"

"A certain amount of control," was his cautious rejoinder, "remains vested in the Company."

"Stop skulking and tell me what you have to tell, Norval Ruyland."

Out of a mumble of broken phrases she seemed to catch the words: "Bad business." "Thought you understood." "Ought to have made sure." Then he was speaking clearly once more. "All our Company leaseholds contain a clause reclaiming the property in case it is used for any purpose contrary to Company policy or interests."

Fredericka loosed her grasp on him. She lifted her hands, removed her hat, and hung it carefully but sightlessly upon a standing lamp at her elbow, to which it gave a startlingly drunken appearance by settling to a racy angle.

"Contrary to Company policy or interests," she repeated in conversational accents. "Yes, meetings would be. Discussions would be. Anything would be. Perfectly in character—for a Ruyland."

"I thought you knew about it," was the best he could think of to say.

"No. No; I didn't know about it. If I had—but what's the use! Perhaps you'll tell me, without trying to save my feelings, how you came to let the club in for that sort of thing."

The even quiet of her tone filled him with inquietude. He began to babble; suitably located properties were difficult to get; the Ruylands controlled all the real estate in the vicinity of the factories; there was the matter of expense; it was the policy of wisdom to maintain some check on the activities of employees, even the purely social; he had acted for the best interests of all concerned, as he supposed; it had always been done with Ruyland gifts and foundations—the hospital, the library,

the park, everything. Settling to more coherent utterance, he eagerly cited the Ruyland Public Library; unless they kept control of that what was to prevent the invasion of radical literature which was spreading through less protected institutions: socialistic books, magazines of discontent, bolshevistic pamphlets? It was the same with the club, in principle. If you let 'em get together there and say whatever was in their minds— He stopped, disconcerted by his realization of the fact that she was not listening to him. "I did it for the best interests of the family," he croaked apprehensively.

In an emotionless level of utterance she said, "I don't think I've ever met a person that I despised as I despise you."

She ran from the room and up the stairs.

Norval sat, staring at the imitation of an intoxicated female reveler afforded by the fashionably hatted lamp. An invisible clock struck ten with violence. He heaved himself to his feet, clumped out to the hallway, along it to the front door, fumbled at the knob, then turned and stumbled up the stairway. She met him at the top. For the moment she thought that he was going to drop to his knees before her, but he only stretched out his hands in plump and ludicrous imploration.

"Fredericka!"

She looked at him steadily, a hateful smile spreading upon her lips. "This house is a Company leasehold also, Norval. Shall I leave it? Or will you?"

He held to the railings as he turned and passed down. Anxiously, but without compunction, she listened to his footsteps crossing the passage, relieved as she heard the front door close. She went to her desk and wrote her resignation from the board of Choral Three.

The resignation of Norval Ruyland was received in the same morning's mail.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

AUNT SARA RUYLAND was dead. It was an unsatisfactory and disappointing demise. Two short years longer, and she would have attained her centenary. Anniversaries of this distinction were by no means unknown in the clan; several of them had already been celebrated, always with pomp and circumstance. Longevity was a part of the pride of the stock. In dying thus prematurely, thereby mulcting Habersham of a festival, Aunt Sara was felt to have cheated her responsibilities. Nevertheless, as she was the head of her branch, there would be a funeral in state from The Rock, and all the factories would enjoy a respectful day off, with pay.

"We'll have to go, of course," said Kennion to his wife when Dawley Cole, in black from head to foot, and sitting behind Carter, the coachman, drove up on his melancholy rounds of announcement.

"You go," said Fredericka. "I never saw her but once, and then all she said to me was 'Ga.'"

"She'd misplaced her teeth, poor old bird," explained Kennion. "But you really ought not to miss the funeral. It'll be an event."

"What will happen?" inquired Fredericka languidly.

"The usual religious ceremony. Then any of the family that feels the spirit move them can wallow in elegy, and at the end the Grandante will stand over the bier and make a few well-chosen remarks. They'll *be* well-chosen, too, with a text and a couple of apt quotations. She's a wiz at quotations, the Grandante. Tennyson,

most likely, though it might be Browning or even Swinburne. All will partake of the funeral baked meats with a liberal supply of spirits—you might think the Irish were waking, if the women-folk would only keen a bit—and the procession will set out in hacks for Last Home. No autos need apply. At the gate we'll get out and traditionally carry our dead to Ruyland Hillock. Don't miss it."

"Your description is as good as being there. I'm not quite up to the real thing. Do you mind, Kennion?"

"Aren't you feeling well?"

"Not specially." The falsehood was mechanical, and no sooner uttered than she flushed, conscious of the vitality that tingled in every vein of her strong young body. "That's fake stuff, Jinky," she corrected. "I'm fit as a panther, but I just don't believe I could stand being cooped up in a room with a hundred live Ruylands and one dead one."

"If it was the other way around perhaps you'd like it better."

She lifted her straight brows at him. "You needn't look so cross. It's very unbecoming to your wild young beauty."

He laughed. "My wild young beauty is about to be obscured in rusty old black clothes for a week."

"Do I have to do that, too?"

"It's the custom."

"All right. I'll be a good little Ruyland, if you'll let me off the funeral."

He hesitated. "The Grandante will be sure to notice it if you're not there. I can't very well tell her the reason you give for not going."

"It isn't the only reason," returned Fredericka, who was feeling painfully honest that morning. "I don't want to run into Norval there."

"Has Norval been gramping again?" he asked carelessly.

"I haven't set eyes on him since our run-in the other night. Kennion, I'm afraid I was pretty rotten to him. But the one thing I cannot stand is the yellow streak."

Kennion pawed his ear thoughtfully, with one of those little, animal-like movements which helped to give him his curious distinctness of personality. "I don't know that I'd call Norval yellow. You don't take tradition and custom into account enough."

"You take it too much, you Ruylands."

"We live by it," said he simply.

"In a world of the past."

"Of course. It's a comfortable world, though."

"Oh, comfortable! Don't you ever want to get out for fear you'll smother?"

"Oh, Freddy, you're making a boggy out of the Ruylands. Forget it! Next year, perhaps, we'll go over to Europe, and you'll come back crazy for Habersham."

No answering light was in her face. "I'm worried about the holiday, too."

He understood. "What's happening at Factory Three?"

"Nobody knows. They don't know, themselves. But there are undercurrents running. Coming just now, the day off gives them more chance to get together and stir each other up for trouble."

He looked at her curiously. "I thought you rather sympathized with their wanting to make trouble."

"I sympathize with their wanting to be treated like self-respecting Americans and not like a lot of coddled and petted slaves," she returned hotly. She checked her fervor. "Isn't it funny," she ruminated, "how one falls into oratorical language as soon as one gets talking about labor matters?"

"I'm sure Mr. Christian Borck would appreciate your rhetoric," he grinned.

"He wouldn't. He's much more simple and direct. By the way, his meeting is postponed. I wonder what that means. Something, certainly."

"Lack of encouragement from the dumb and driven proletariat," he suggested. "I suppose you'll go if he does pull it?"

"The Grandante can't very well fire *me*." Her eyes twinkled. "Would you fire me if I went?"

"Fire my own boss?" he chuckled. "It isn't done, in Ruyland circles."

Restlessness beset Fredericka Ruyland after Kennion had left the house on the afternoon of the funeral. The idea came to her of going to Choral Three club house to see what was going on. To-day she would be assured of not encountering Norval there. Not that she shrank from meeting Norval; she wanted to see him again, but it must be somewhere where they could talk things out alone; where she could contrive some way to salve that hurt which she now felt to have been gratuitously cruel. Never would she feel the same way toward the Grampian again; never could she trust him or rely upon him for any steadfastness of policy or purpose where the Ruyland interests might be involved on the other side. Nevertheless, the old, warm, friendly, playful affection was re-asserting itself, combined with a tolerant pity. He was such a helpless creature of his circumstances!

At the club an eager group claimed her, men and girls, all talking at once and at top pitch. Choral Three was, for the time, a most unmusical entity. Fredericka noted the absence of most of the older members: Sam Coleson, Carpenter, Ben Ainsworth, Billings. Where were they? Gone to the funeral, as Factory Three's official mourners. But they were in sympathy with the

move just decided upon. What was that? To have it out, once and for all, with Mrs. Ruyland, about this meeting. Not that they cared specially for Borck and his union, though there was a minority strongly in favor of unionizing, but they had a right to do as they pleased outside of working hours. Next thing, she'd be telling 'em what to eat for dinner and coming around to tuck 'em in bed for the night. They were going to send an official delegation to see her, and if she didn't come down from her perch, they'd show her where she got off!

"You'll never get anywhere by threatening her," warned Fredericka.

"I s'pose you think we oughta lay down and take our pap without a whimper," sneered one of the women. Fredericka recognized the speaker, a blowzy slattern of thirty, the mother of five uncared-for children, and, by the strange favor of the gods, the possessor of a gorgeous, untrained mezzo-soprano voice.

"No; I think you're right to go to Mrs. Ruyland. But some of the older lot ought to be on the committee."

"You ought to be on it," boldly proffered a six-foot mechanic.

"This is Factory Three, not Choral Three, business. I wouldn't have any standing."

"But you're with us?" pleaded an anxious voice.

"Absolutely, so far as your rights go. As for unionizing, Borck's got to show me that his union would give us—give you a better deal than you're getting now from the Company."

"Borck's got nothing to do with this," said several voices so hastily as to establish in Fredericka's consciousness the knowledge that Borck did have much to do with it, and also that a considerable element there did not wholly trust her.

A final meeting, it was arranged, to be held after the

mortuary delegation had returned, would appoint representatives who should advance a formal request for a hearing by Mrs. Ruyland. On her way out, Fredericka passed the bulletin board, still bearing the interdiction against the holding of meetings on the premises. An aged night watchman from Factory Six sat opposite in a chair, smoking a pipe. He made no response to her greeting. It took Fredericka a moment to realize that this was evidence of tact, not discourtesy.

Kennion was at home, getting out of his "blacks" into the comfort of a dressing gown, when she returned. The funeral, she gathered, had been a great success from the Ruyland viewpoint. The Grandante was in special form. Josephus was not there. ("Making an infernal ass of himself," was the reporter's parenthetical comment.) But Elberta was, looking quite beautiful and bringing Ransome Case with her, apparently for no other purpose than to advertise her rebellious intentions to the family at large. ("Riding for a fall, that girl.") Fredericka told him of the upheaval in Choral Three. He was unimpressed.

"Let 'em send their committees," he observed. "They won't get anywhere with Aunt Augusta. She'll walk over their necks."

"But they're right, Kennion," she insisted.

He looked at her with his disarmingly ingenuous grin. "Of course they're right. Where does that get 'em with the Grandante?"

"I'd like to be there and see it."

"That's easy. Ring her up and tell her so."

"No, I wouldn't quite care to do that."

"I'll do it, then." And, deaf to her dissuasions, he went to the phone. Shortly he returned. "Mrs. Hasleton Ruyland presents her compliments to her grandniece, Fredericka, and will be charmed to see her at nine o'clock

this evening. She believes that, as a Ruyland, Fredericka will find both interest and profit in observing how the head of the Ruyland Paper Company deals with its employees."

Fredericka's mouth crinkled at the corners. "If I weren't a perfect lady, Jinky, with the dignity of the family to uphold, I'd say 'The hell she does!' I'll go."

The high-ceiled main library of The Rock, with its ancestral daubs ornamenting the walls, had all the air of an audience chamber when Fredericka arrived. This effect was heightened by the bearing of the Grandante, regal in her throne-like chair, with the splendor of the Ruyland sapphires glowing at her breast, blue flickers against the glossy black of her most impressive evening dress. Obviously the stage was set for a state occasion.

"The committee is outside," said the mistress of The Rock, after greeting her guest.

"Have they been waiting long?" Fredericka had once been to a prize-fight where she had noted the nerve-wrecking effect of a long delay, imposed by the champion upon his less experienced challenger. Her surmise that the Grandante was practicing the gentle psychology of goat-getting was dispelled by her answer:

"They're not waiting. Miss Owen is showing them some slides of the new rice paper that has just come in from Germany. They like to keep up with the scientific end of the business."

Always something new to marvel at, in Augusta Ruyland's strangely compounded personality, thought the visitor. What more effective bond could there be between employer and employee than the assumption by the former of a mutual interest in something transcending the mere give-and-take of their interrelation?

"Is any one else to be here?" asked the girl.

"Norval was asked, but seemed to think that he would

be superfluous." A slight and slighting smile broadened the fine line of the lips. "He would be," she added.

There was a stir at the door. Fredericka settled herself to observation, with lively curiosity to see how the delegation would carry itself in the presence of local royalty, full-panoplied. To her surprise, they appeared quite at their ease. For the moment she had forgotten the Grandante's socially stimulating effect upon her own flaccid and disintegrating tea party, some months earlier; also the fact that she regularly entertained her employees at The Rock. If it was grandeur that sat enthroned, it was grandeur graciously condescending in amity and humorous familiarity. Fredericka admired the strategy with which the old lady, in her first words, stripped the occasion of its protective armor as a committee visitation, and put it on the footing of a mere personal chat with a group of old and well-liked acquaintances: this without relaxing the reserve inapproachability upon which none might dare to presume.

"Very glad to see you all here. . . . Mary, I see your boy won the *Courier* prize picture contest this week." . . . "Castle on the queen's side, Sam (this to Coleson) and you won't need to phone me again about *that* problem." . . . (To old man Devlin:) "Keep off that stock, Jim. It's no good. I'll find you something safe later." . . . "How's Della getting on as a married woman, Tom? (This to Carpenter, adding with her insatiate bias for birth:) Any prospects yet?" To which he replied with a grin, "A bit early yet, Mrs. Ruyland." And she, "Can't begin a good job too soon." . . . "Who's this young man? Oh, Angus Blair's oldest. Well, I should have known you from your favor to your father." . . . "Tell Fanny that her cherry bounce is better than mine, Charley. I want her recipe." She completed the roster, with something intimate for each.

A hum of small and cheerful talk surrounded her. When it subsided she said briskly: "Well, let's get business done and out of the way. What's the trouble? Don't all talk at once," she added, with a touch of raillery as they looked uncertainly at each other in silence. "Come on, Sam Coleson, you do the talking if the rest have lost their tongues."

This was not according to program, but the program was already wrecked, with Augusta Ruyland cheerfully presiding over the wreckage. Sam Coleson spoke. It was in the nature of a plea made to a friend, not the high-spirited enunciation of eternal principles that had been planned at the meeting. The Grandante's robust good humor broke in upon a decidedly limping conclusion:

"Don't talk trash, Sam. Borck's put you up to this. He can't do you any good. Keep away from him; that's all you have to do and there won't be any trouble. We're just where we were at first: any of you who prefers Borck's brand of anarchy to a Ruyland job can go to his meeting and welcome. But he can't keep the job if he does. Don't you be damned fools. That's all. Now we'll go to the dining-room and see if cook has left anything out for us."

So the conference ended.

Five days later Christian Borck held a scantily attended meeting of protest. But it was not wholly unfruitful, since among those present were Ben Ainsworth, Sam Coleson, Devlin, and the slatternly Mary Ray. On the morning following they, with sixteen others, representative of the various factories, got their pay checks. A roster of their names and notice of their discharge was posted in every factory.

Thus did Augusta Ruyland deal with her employees.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

"You see," said Kennion to Fredericka Ruyland over their eight o'clock breakfast, "it was all bluff. Your committees talk and don't do anything. The Grandante acts and doesn't say much. And where's your strike?"

Nearly two weeks had passed since the Borck meeting and the discharge of the recalcitrants. Nothing had happened but threats. Vainly Christian Borck had used his utmost endeavors to incite the factories, and particularly Factory Three. Tradition of fair treatment and awe of the Ruyland power was too much for him. He had left Habersham, fuming with disgust.

"I don't know," answered Fredericka. "The whole thing was too stupid!"

"It usually is. I hear you've taken on Ben Ainsworth as steward of Choral Three club."

"Yes. That's to keep him eligible for the organization. We need his voice."

"The Grandante will never stand for that."

"We'll keep him on anyway," she asserted.

"Secretly?" He seemed amused.

"Why not? Who'd tell her? You?"

"If you think that's a fair question—"

"It wasn't. It was pretty raw. But I never can tell whether you're on her side or mine."

"Anyway," he remarked, "it's an academic question now."

"Why? What has she done?" was the quick, nervous response.

"Warned him to keep off the premises."

Fredericka's face was not pleasant to see. "She'd better keep her hands off Choral Three."

"She'll never keep her hands off anything in Habersham," returned Kennion with a sort of pleased acceptance, which helped to infuriate his wife.

"Then I'm going to get into this fight!" she proclaimed.

"You? What can you do against the Grandante?"

"Bring on the strike," she retorted tersely. "They're just waiting for some one to take the lead. Borck wouldn't do because he's an outsider. But if I—"

"Yes, if you, a Ruyland—" he began.

She had never seen a look like that in his eyes. They sat, staring at each other, uncertain, apprehensive, defiant.

The front door opened and closed. The maid laboriously brought in a cardboard box almost her own height.

"Looks like a coffin," observed Kennion lightly. He was glad of the diversion, of the relaxation of tension. He sniffed the air. "Hello! Flowers. Roses, by my guess."

Fredericka read the label in a voice of stupefaction. "Carterson and—" Her voice failed her. She sawed at the strings with her fruit knife until the box fell open, half disgorging a great mass of crimson blossoms, dozens upon dozens of them. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "It can't be!"

"What? *Again!*" said Kennion quizzically.

"He promised me he wouldn't," she cried. "He said he'd never do it again as long as he lived."

The smile died out of Kennion's face. "Is *that* what he said?"

"Yes. In the talk we had here." He rose. "Where are you going?" she demanded sharply.

"To telephone."

Through strained ears she heard the click of the re-

leased lever; the call "Garnston One-nine-seven, please." An interminable silence; a lowered voice. . . . "Yes, Kennion. . . . All right." . . . Something indistinguishable; then another pause. No good-by.

Kennion came back into the room, went to the sideboard, and carefully poured a drink. She noticed that he overdid the portion a little and was quite accurate in pouring it back. But he did not drink it. Instead he crossed the room, bearing the glass to her.

Then she understood.

"Norval?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"How?"

"Overdose of medicine."

"Suicide?"

"What else—after this?" He nodded toward the box.

"When?"

"They found him half an hour ago."

She put her arms around the coffin-like oblong, drew it to her breast, and let her head drop amidst the lustrous glory of the roses.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

STRIKE talk died with the death of Norval Ruyland, Factory Three was astounded to discover how well it had really liked him. While he was alive it had merely accepted him as a main cog in the mechanism of Ruyland control, a typical and rather impersonal embodiment of Ruyland power and responsibility. Now legends sprouted over his memory like small flowers in graveyard earth; of careful and furtive kindnesses rendered, wise counsel to those in trouble, painstaking adjustments of others' minor difficulties, secret generosity both of time and money, wholly different in spirit and practice from the robustious and intimate fellowship of the Grandante's benefactions; perhaps not as easy to accept nor as obvious in their good will, yet absolved, by their very shyness, of the taint of charity. As the head of the factory he had been patient, fair-spirited, and direct. The employees had always respected him; they had never before had occasion to realize the background of a warmer sentiment. A cult of loyalty to his memory and what were believed to be his principles, became the fashion of Factory Three. Christian Borck would have fared ill had he brought his propaganda back to Habersham just then.

By that subtle undersense which pervades seasoned organizations, it was felt that Fredericka Ruyland was the heir and representative of the dead man's policies, and this held good not alone for Choral Three in which she had been so conspicuous a figure, but also in Factory Three wherewith she had, at most, a connection of sen-

timent and interest. At her behest they would have pulled down the factory walls, stone from stone, or built it into a temple with the unpaid labor of their hands, as a memorial to Norval Ruyland.

To the shock and grief caused by the tragedy of Norval's death, there succeeded within Fredericka a gnawing doubt that must be resolved. Had Norval really died by his own hand? Could there be no other meaning to the crimson roses? And, if it was suicide, were the roses accusation or absolution? She spent a sleepless night over that debate, and in the morning took it to Henry Stanley, clan physician to the Ruylands.

Dr. Stanley was a man of worn and impenetrable countenance and deliberate speech. He liked Fredericka, though it was a humorous pretense of his to resent her vivid good health as affording an evil example in a city overstocked with physicians who needed the money. His favorite jest upon seeing her was, "Anything in my line to-day, young Freddy?" On this morning it died, halfway to completion on his lips, at sight of her tortured face.

"Sit down," he ordered, "and don't say a word till I give you permission." He disappeared and came back with a teaspoonful of liquid in the bottom of a small glass. "Brandy," he said. "Drink it down. Here's water." She obeyed. "Quiet, please." He busied himself about the office, opened a window letting in the chill air, drew a shade shutting out the level, early sun-glare. "Now, go ahead, and keep your grip on yourself."

"What did Norval die of, Dr. Stanley?" The question leaped from the broken dam of her silence.

"My certificate says an accidental overdose of medicine."

"Had you been attending him?"

"Yes; for a few days."

"And left the medicine with him?"

"I left some medicine with him," was the cautious rejoinder.

"What was in it?"

He looked at her, long and deliberatively, before replying: "Sugar, coloring matter, peppermint."

"And *that* killed him?"

"No; that did not kill him."

"What did?"

"Some other medicine. Opiate. I don't know where he got it. New York, probably. I don't give potentially fatal drugs to patients in Norval Ruyland's mental condition."

"What was his mental condition? Was he insane?" she asked eagerly.

"A meaningless term. He had lost the desire of life."

"Then he did kill himself?"

"What reason have *you* to think so?"

She told him of the roses. "Anything else?" he asked.

Her hands went out, spread wide in a surrendering gesture. "I'll tell you anything."

"You'd better tell me everything."

At the end of the broken recital he said: "You are the second penitent to come to my confessional this morning." And, in answer to her look: "Dawley Cole has as bad a case of remorse as you have and with, I fear, more cause. The business of being a spy has gone to his liver. He is very yellow in the eye. Jaundice strongly indicated. As you have told me so much, I may as well complete your information with his." He filled out the tale of the crimson roses with the private reporter's too expert interpretation of their source.

"Does Mrs. Ruyland know?"

"Augusta?" He shook his head, a grim smile upon his lips. "Whatever she knows or suspects, she will

interpret to clear herself of any blame. Instinctively. That's her nature. Indestructible consciousness of rectitude. It's a saving grace—for oneself."

"My head won't think right," complained Fredericka, putting her hands to her temples with a childish movement. "Won't you *please* tell me what you think? Who *is* to blame?"

"Six generations of Ruylands," came the slow and oracular verdict; "inter-marrying, inter-breeding Ruylands. At the end is produced a Norval, robustly healthy in body, but with the inner thread of life—the desire of life—too thin-drawn. Not enough holding power. He isn't the only suicide in his line, you know. Don't blame yourself, my dear," he continued kindly. "Being in love with you didn't kill Norval. I wouldn't even say but what it was a good thing for him; perhaps the most vitalizing experience in an undervitalized life."

"But I told him I despised him," whispered the girl wretchedly. "If I only could have seen him once more, to explain!"

"Even so, I don't think that was the cause. It is more likely to have been fear, the shame of having made himself ridiculous. Hidden over-sensitiveness is one of the stigmata of a waning stock. If I were a diagnostician of the soul instead of the body, I should say that he got his mortal wound the night of the dinner at The Rock, and that he has been slowly dying of it ever since. The end was only a question of time." He tapped his breast with a significant gesture. "Something weakened, through the generations, deeper inside than science can clearly see. I am puzzled, though, by something he said to me last week: that a man is no longer justified in living when he is of more value dead. It doesn't sound like the unphilosophical Norval, does it? I laughed and told him that was bad doctrine for the insurance com-

panies. Now I see he was justifying himself. He must have had something definite in mind, as to his value when dead. Perhaps there's a clew to it in the letter he left for you."

Fredericka looked up with a jerk of the head almost spasmodic. "Did he leave a letter for me? Where?"

"It was by his bedside with a number of others, all neatly addressed and stamped."

She rose. "It ought to be in the first mail, then. I'll let you know if there's anything. Thank you, Dr. Stanley. You're quite certain—"

He understood the anxiety clamoring for appeasement. "Quite, my dear. Don't brood over any supposed responsibility for what began to happen a hundred years ago."

As she hurried home, she had to force her mind to a realization of the fact that Norval had deliberately chosen to die; Norval, to whom in her light estimate she had denied any capacity for emotion, for passion, for tragedy. And his roses were waiting at home; that gallant, un-Norval-like flourish of drama at the fall of the curtain: those and his letter, containing—what pregnant message?

As she turned the corner toward her house she saw Robert Enderby coming swiftly toward her from the other street. She stopped and waited.

"I've just got back to town and heard," he said.

"Did you know why—" The rest of the question stuck in her throat.

"Yes. I knew," he answered gravely. Only his tone said: "How should I not know, who have loved you myself!"

A pity and a terror for herself and for him swept her. "Bobby," she whispered, "it's a terrible thing to be loved like that."

"It wasn't your fault," he defended quickly. "You can't help being loved—like that."

She thrust out her hands against it. "I don't want it. It mustn't be." As they reached the steps she looked at him piteously. "Bobby, I'm afraid to go in."

"Afraid? Of your—of Kennion?"

At that her head went up. "No." Curious how little Kennion meant to her either for blame or for help in this crisis. "Of Norval's letter." She told him of the talk with Dr. Stanley.

"Shall I wait for you here or come in?" he asked.

How surely he had divined that she would depend upon him! But she did not want him—and this she could not analyze at the moment—in the same house with Kennion. Not just then. "I'll come out," she said.

Kennion had divided the morning's mail and was reading his when she entered. In the little heap at her place was nothing from Norval. Her first sensation was one of infinite relief; then there pressed in upon her the problem of what had become of the letter. She must find out.

At the expression on her face as she rejoined him, Enderby raised his brows in unspoken question.

"Nothing," she said breathlessly. "I'm going back to Dr. Stanley's."

He fell into step beside her without saying a word. Yet she had never been more alive to his presence, his support, his sure and steadfast loyalty, and she blessed him inwardly for that understanding silence. Into the doctor's house she walked, this time unhesitatingly. Enderby waited outside.

Dr. Stanley's rugged face twitched with surprise when she said:

"There was no letter at home for me. Are you positive about it?"

"Certain. I debated as to mailing it, myself. I wish now I had."

"Why? What do you think became of it?" she demanded feverishly.

"Augusta Ruyland came in as I was leaving and took charge of the effects."

Fredericka caught up the telephone and called The Rock. Miss Owen answered. . . . No; the secretary was sorry but Mrs. Ruyland could not be disturbed. Not by anybody. She, Miss Owen, had just written a note to Mrs. Kennion Ruyland on behalf of her employer; should she read it? . . . Just a moment, then. . . . The thin, spinsterish voice read:

"DEAR MRS. RUYLAND:

"Mrs. Hasleton Ruyland instructs me to inform you that a letter addressed to you and found in the effects of the late Mr. Norval Ruyland has, after careful deliberation, been destroyed by her, unread.

"Very truly,

"EMMA OWEN."

On the sidewalk Fredericka held out her hand to Enderby. "I'm all right now, Bobby." There was no spoken acknowledgment but her fingers clung to his for a moment before she turned away.

As she reëntered the house on the corner, Kennion looked up from his paper. "Funeral to-morrow afternoon," said he. "Were you thinking of going?"

"Why?"

"Under the circumstances it would perhaps be as well if you didn't."

She drew from a scabbard-like vase on the mantel one of Norval's roses and held it across her breast.

"I'd go now," she answered him passionately, "if every Ruyland on earth barred my way."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

ALL the Ruylands that Fredericka had ever before seen in one group were insignificant as compared with the gathering at The Rock for Norval's funeral. They filled the spacious, vaulted room to the doors, overflowing into the adjacent apartments. The mass of them, their homogeneousness of lineament, expression and apparel, the solidarity of the clan, oppressed her, overbore her spirit with its sheer moral weight. Only by an intrepid effort of the will had she forced herself to go. She owed that much to Norval, whose last message—perhaps asking her to come?—would never reach her. She owed it to herself, and, a debt to be paid in bitterness, to Augusta Ruyland. At the last, before leaving her house, she had pinned one of the roses beneath her coat; secretly, because she felt that Kennion might misconstrue. She needed something to fortify her courage for the ordeal.

Norval's casket stood at the far end of the room. It was plain black; no gleam of silver showed. There was not a flower on it. Death, with the Ruylands, had the dignity of severity. The opening above the quiet face was set with a glass panel. Through this, the family and the close friends would view their dead.

Kennion touched her arm, as the line of inspection moved forward, his brows raised in mute question. She shook her head. Not that. She doubted whether her feet would carry her there. She felt sick and numb. Kennion went forward alone, only a few steps, as their bench was near the front. Next to him was old Jim

Devlin. Fredericka saw the workman's heavy back heave, heard the strangled breath of his grief as he looked down at his dead boss and friend, saw her husband slip an arm across his shoulder and lead him back, blinded, to his seat. It was painfully vivid, yet remote from the dull, pervading throb of her own sorrow. They were closing the slide now. The Ruyland clergyman spoke, with a flow of elegiac verbiage. After his encomium came the tributes of the clan, voiced by the sub-chieftains. Each went forward to the casket, said his words, few or many, and withdrew. John was commonplace. Peter W., 3d, dealt in minor reminiscence. Calvert Ruyland-Marsh was oratorical; Kennion, brief and vague. Through it all, Fredericka sat unmoved. She was waiting for Augusta Ruyland, who would speak last, waiting with an inner prescience of some special message or purport. She was surprised when Mahlon Ruyland took his place beside the dead man.

Mahlon looked incredibly old, with his yellowish-parchment face. His eyes were glazed and unseeing. He let fall a hand on the black oblong:

"We used to go fishing together," said he quite loudly. "Used to run away and go fishing together," he added, lowering his voice to a touchingly confidential pitch.

He patted the coffin, looked about him, shook his head as if at a loss for anything further to add to that memory, and sat down in the nearest seat.

In front of Fredericka, old Selah B. abruptly dropped his head into his hands. She heard the twins, off to one side, begin an old-maidenly whimpering. Fredericka hoped that she was going to cry, too. It might relieve the intolerable pressure behind her eyeballs. But no tears came. . . .

What was happening now? Augusta Ruyland's voice,

effortlessly filling the space. It was a character sketch of the dead that she was giving, with all the art of the born orator; narrative and reminiscence, interspersed with text and felicitous quotation, a masterly performance. Fredericka lost special consciousness of the meaning of the words, letting her weary mind be lulled by the measured sweep of the utterance—until she became aware of a hardening of the clear voice, an accusative ring to it, the growing fire and fervor of the fanatic rousing herself to a climax, and at the same time felt herself the focus of eyes, centering upon her from all sides. Was Mrs. Ruyland speaking to her; about her? Was she connecting her with Norval Ruyland's self-destruction?

The speaker's arm rose, pointed, stiffened like that of a sibyl. Fredericka heard the rhythm of familiar words, overwhelming her with their terrible import:

"Well is it that no child is born of thee.
The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin and the breaking up of laws."

Fredericka rose. She must get away. Instantly. Escape, out of that place. *Must!* Or be smothered in the poison of that monstrous defilement. How she got past Kennion, she did not know. She thought that he tried to withhold her. . . . Now she was in the aisle. Could she do it? Could she compel her bloodless muscles to carry her through the serried indictment of those watching Ruyland eyes? Without help? Without Kennion? Instinctively she found herself wishing that Norval were there, dependable Norval. *He* would never let her go through that ordeal alone and unfriended. But surely Kennion would come! Had she cried aloud his name in the intensity of that hope?

Footsteps in the aisle, overtaking her; a grip on her

arm, thrusting beneath the pit of it, upholding her more by the human warmth of contact and sympathy than by its merely physical support. A surge of thankfulness, of tenderness for her husband, swept her soul. He was with her. He was standing to her in her need; to her as against all the Ruylands. She did not raise her eyes, but pressed the comforting hand close to her body.

The thickened air which had been choking her lungs, freshened. They were in the outer room. She drew a thrilling breath and summoned the deep-drawn courage of a smile for her knight, as she lifted her eyes to him.

"You!"

Dawley Cole said, "I was afraid you couldn't make it."

"I couldn't have, alone. But—*you!*"

With the strength restored to her by the shock of that supreme astonishment, she turned her eyes to the room they had just left. Dimly she heard a murmur in her ear: "Some one had to go with you." Yes, some one; but that one had not been her husband! Kennion was still in his place, his shoulders hunched forward. Augusta Ruyland still stood over the dead man, glaring after them with a face of doom. Even in her stricken disillusionment, Fredericka thought of her companion.

"Go back," she whispered urgently, "or she'll never forgive you."

"She'll never forgive me now," said Dawley Cole. His plump-fed, daintily tailored figure was shaking from head to foot. (The pitiful little coward. The valorous little martyr!)

Fredericka knew that it was so. The despot would never forgive her serf for that impetuous adherence to the enemy. "Take me out of here," she said.

Behind them the Grandante's oratory resumed its sonorous swing.

Mahlon intercepted them at the peanut-brittle bridge.

He put out a shaking hand, touched Fredericka's arm. "We used to run away and go fishing together," said he hoarsely.

She looked at him with doubt and pity. Had grief temporarily unsettled his dry, little brain? "I know," she said kindly, "when you were boys."

"When we were men," he answered eagerly. "We sneaked away from the factories many a gray afternoon."

In spite of her inner turmoil, the girl smiled. The thought of those two innocents playing truant from their jobs, to whip the depopulated trout-streams of the region, was a relief to her burdened spirit. And she realized, too, that what this strange person was trying to tell her was: "I loved him." She put it in a question, direct, and he answered fervidly: "Yes. Would you tell me something?" he went on; and, assuming her assent, added: "What did it all mean, all that that Augusta Ruyland said? Did Norval kill himself? I thought I got something showing that he did, underneath what she said."

"Yes," replied Fredericka. With all the bitterness of her own wrath she added: "You were at the dinner. You should know what drove him to it."

"God damn her," said Mahlon Ruyland, with such a terrific quiet of sincerity that it took on the force of an invocation rather than of an oath.

The two men went home with her, leaving her at her door. Inside, she went at once to her room and wired to her mother:

"Come, if you can. K. has left me. Fredericka."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THERE is a tide in the affairs of mortals which stands poised, neither ebbing nor flowing. For Fredericka Ruyland, after the ordeal of Norval's funeral, time seemed to have stopped. All that made up life for her was in a stilled suspense. Factory Three, under Calvert Ruyland-Marsh, continued its daily stint of turning out the famous Ruyland Bond in ten styles and seven tints, two of the latter, Coral White and Coral Buff, punningly profiting by the waxing fame of the musical organization; but to the industrial activity she was now quite alien. Choral Three held its meetings and rehearsals, which she attended. She moved through her domestic environment, accomplishing the routine of her duties, without apprehension or preparation for what might come. Mrs. Gage had responded to her summons, listened long, and spoken briefly.

"I shouldn't make a move or ask a question. Can you stand it for a month or six weeks?"

"Yes. What then?"

"Then we'll see. I shall be back from the South by that time. If there were any way of getting out of it, I wouldn't go. Do you want me to see Augusta Ruyland before I go?"

"What good would it do?"

"None." The plain, plump little woman looked steadily at her daughter and there was a fine pride in her eyes. "I'm not afraid for you, Ricky. Not if all the Ruylands were against you. And they're not."

As always, most of the clan had taken their tone and

attitude from the Head. In the week following the funeral Fredericka, making her rounds, had been treated to reserved or timid looks, as if she had become not only undesirable as an acquaintance, but also possibly contagious, and to the most formal timidity of speech. The twins, whom she met one morning in the market, were intending to cut her, she was sure; but she marched upon them with so determined an accost that they lost courage and hastily babbled out some salient observations about the weather. As she turned away, Fredericka was pleased to observe that the thinner and homelier one had dropped her basket and spilled all the flowers off the top. Augusta Ruyland she had encountered but once, driving behind the blacks, and had gravely returned her unaltered bow. But, as her mother had said, all the Ruylands were not against her.

Selah B. had made a point of sending her two special consignments of roses from his conservatories, not crimson ones; he was too tactful for that. Mahlon, wearing a tall hat of a species which she had never before seen off the stage, came to make a call as formal and ancient in manner as the headpiece. Even Josephus, the stupid, telephoned to ask if he might come up to tea and embarrassed himself excessively trying to express sympathy, after which he turned to cursing the Grand-ante and did very well at it. Most wished-for of all, Dawley Cole came, looking very depressed.

"What did she do to you?" queried Fredericka.

"Abused me like a dog," was the little man's bitter reply. "A yellow dog."

"I'm sorry," was all that she could find to say.

"It was coming to me," said he in a tone of cankered self-realization. "I'd been her yellow dog for years. Well, I won't be any more. I'm out of a job. The kennel's vacant."

"Oh, and it was because of what you did for me!" cried the distressed girl. "I was afraid of that."

"No; I never could have done her dirty work again—not after poor Norval." He gave a painful gulp. "If I'd kept my mouth shut, he'd be alive now."

"She's the one that killed him," returned Fredericka harshly. "What are you going to do now?" she added.

"I'll have to find a job," said Dawley Cole with tragic simplicity. "Do you think perhaps that Kennion—"

He lifted his nose hopefully like an outcast puppy scenting a possible meal.

"I wouldn't depend upon Kennion, if I were you," she answered with such an intonation that he looked at her and looked hastily away again.

Depend upon Kennion! Never again would she do that. Something deeper and more quenchless than anger burned within her at the thought of her husband who had said, before he was her husband in more than name: "Nobody's ever going to come between you and me as long as you love me"—and had said it a little too late. How well she remembered now the sinking of her spirit which she had resolutely denied at the time! And now, at the test, he had turned from her to the Ruyland mastery, as exemplified in the most formidable and despotic and Ruylandish of them all. Quite clearly she hated Augusta Ruyland; yet that feeling was not so unmingled, so determinative, so final as her revulsion against Kennion, with whom she still shared the house that was theirs without being theirs.

What her soul craved was release, relief from the pervading Ruyland atmosphere; all the more keenly after her mother had left. The want grew in poignancy, in obsession, presently focusing itself. She wanted to see Bob Enderby, the only non-Ruyland with whom she could talk freely. But she would not send for him

to come to the house. Despite her independence of spirit, some inner restraint prevented her.

She ran upon him one day, standing on the curb outside The Rock.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

His tired face lighted up to the old boyishness at sight of her. "Studying the fortifications," he replied.

"Are you thinking of laying siege to the place?"

"It's built for a siege, isn't it! So is its mistress."

The smile darkened out of Fredericka's face. "Nothing will ever dislodge her."

"Maybe not, if you mean any outside force."

"What else could?"

He made no direct answer, but said musingly: "How do you suppose it must feel to be living back in a former century, forging it around you like an unremovable armor, and to have a later century all about you, pressing in on you with new claims, new standards, new ideas and creeds? It must be like living in a constant siege, don't you think? Years are the real besiegers. Nothing stands against them; not even Ruylands."

"Oh, Bobby!" she said, and there was both warmth and weariness in her voice. "Do we have to talk about the Ruylands, you and I?"

He nodded. "Yes; I do. About this particular Ruyland. She's quite in the center of things for me, and I need your help."

"What can I possibly do?"

"I'm trying to read her character," he explained. "People write their autographs when they build their houses. Look at that preposterous bridge. She must have built it out of her own head. What does it mean? Had she been reading Scott or dreaming bad dreams over too much indulgence in peanut candy? Of course, she *may* be a dyspeptic, but *I* think she's a romantic."

"A romantic!" repeated the scornful Fredericka. "She's about as romantic as my toothbrush."

"No, but look at those towers," he protested. "Every time I pass them I have a premonition that some jerkin-clad retainer is going to rush forth and cry, 'What ho, varlets! Lower the portcullis!' and that I'll then be pinned to the nearest telegraph pole by a clothyard shaft, while the clan trumpeter sounds a flourish, probably on the jazzpipe just to give a touch of the Twentieth Century to the anachronism. She's the most anachronistic anachronism now anachronizing."

"Why are you so interested in her?"

"I told you. She's interfering. Or didn't I tell you? Well, she is."

"Yes; that's her specialty, interference."

"Give me a couple of months longer and she can fire me and welcome. By that time I'll have my scheme so far established that it can't be spoiled."

"Does she want to fire you?"

"N-n-no; she doesn't. But she's making it hard for me."

"I was afraid it might be another Ransome Case thing. You know about that?"

He nodded his assent. "Yes, I miss Case. He worked in with me on a lot of details. What's he going to do now?"

"Marry Elberta Ruyland."

Enderby smiled. "That's a woman's answer. Assuming that marrying Elberta is the most important thing in life—"

"It is the most important thing in life for both of them," interrupted Fredericka, "and you needn't be cynical and superior about it. Besides, it completely and effectually gums Mrs. Ruyland's game."

"Which is, perhaps, the most important thing in life to you," he supplied amusedly.

Her face darkened. "It isn't exactly a joke to me. You've heard what happened at Norval Ruyland's funeral, of course."

"No. I'm just back in town."

"I'd like you to know," said she. "Come back to the house where we can talk."

There she gave him a terse, unemotional outline of what had happened.

"And your husband—" he began, and stopped the query short.

"Sat tight."

"But since?"

"We haven't discussed it."

He sat silent, looking at her.

"Well?" she challenged. "Got anything to say?"

She knew that, at that moment, burning with unexpressed resentment as she was, weak with the craving for sympathy, she would go to his arms if he put out a hand to her—and despise herself after their one kiss. She guessed that he knew it, too.

"No," he answered quietly.

She jumped to her feet, rearranged the last of Norval's roses in the tall vase. How sedulously she had tended them, to keep them alive so long! "I've burdened you enough with my troubles," she announced, forcing a note of gayety. "Let's hear the rest of yours."

"Mine are simple and impersonal compared to yours. Not entirely impersonal, either. The old dame won't let 'em be. She insists on injecting personalities into what ought to be a business relation."

"Another of her specialties. How, for instance?"

His color heightened. "She shows an annoying in-

terest in my comings and goings, and—and, well, my entirely personal affairs. I come away from The Rock feeling as if I'd been fencing with an opponent who carries a sword while I have only a foil."

"She asks impertinent questions, you mean?"

He nodded.

"About me?" demanded Fredericka, ever direct.

"Yes."

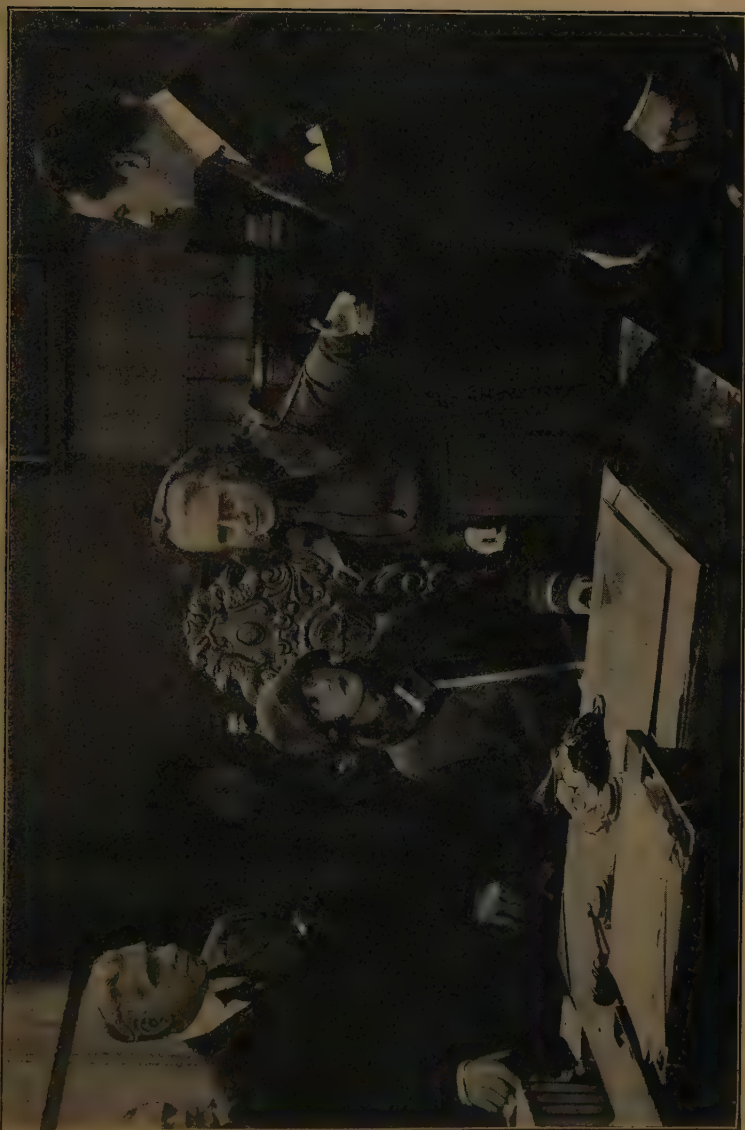
"I suppose she thinks we're too much interested in one another. Wonder if we are," she speculated recklessly.

"Ricky!"

"No. Sit down, Bobby." Fredericka's recklessness ebbed. "And, for God's sake, don't call me 'Ricky' just now, or I shall probably become a wet rag and drape myself around your neck, and it won't mean a damn thing except that my nerves have gone to tatters. Bobby, I wish I'd married you."

"What am I expected to say to that?" he asked, quite pale.

"Nothing. You're expected to sit quiet with a kind, sympathetic look on your intellectual features, and let me maunder on. It's nothing for you to pride yourself on, my wishing I'd married you—though I probably would have if I could have foreseen that you were going to make a man and not a human sponge of yourself—seeing that in the last few months I've variously wished I'd married Norval, and old Selah B. and Josephus and the postman, and almost anybody. Bobby, if I start to say anything against Kennion, choke me, will you? He's still my husband, you know, legally. It's rather laughable, don't you think? Couldn't you laugh about it? I could. I could laugh like an id—an idiot. I think I'm going to, right now. . . . Bobby! What—"



A Universal-Jewel Production.

"THE FLAPPER HAS BEATEN ME—I RESIGN."

Siege.

He was on her in a flash, had caught her by both shoulders and was shaking her with all the force of his powerful muscles.

"Tha-a-a-a-at's r-r-r-right!" she chattered. "S-s-s-s-shake it out of me. . . . 'Snuff," she gasped presently. "L-l-lemme go, Bobby." He peered at her doubtfully. "I'm through," she promised. "Ouch!" She prodded her jaw with tender fingers. "All my back teeth are loosened," she announced plaintively. "You gorilla!"

"Want some water?"

"Want some Scotch."

"You don't get it."

"All right," she accepted. Meek, indeed, for Fredericka! "Who'd have thought it! I never believed in hysterics before. What would you have done if I hadn't come out?"

"Slapped your face," was the prompt reply. "Poured the ice pitcher down your neck, and if that wasn't enough, bitten your ear—"

"—then hit me over the head with the ax and thrown me down the coal-hole," she concluded. "You're a rough diamond, Bobby, with the accent on the rough. Sink back in your luxurious chair now and go on with your troubles."

"That's about all. The Grandante and I get on like a pair of doves about everything else. If I could figure out what she's after, it would be easier."

"Most likely she doesn't know, herself. It's just her ruling passion for butting in on everything. Not that she wouldn't be tickled pink to get something on me."

"That's all rot!" said the indignant engineer. "Why, we've hardly seen each other."

"Well, there was one evening at the club," she smiled, "when I seem to remember having had quite a smatter-

ing of you in the course of the proceedings. Oh, what does it matter! Your work here will be finished pretty soon anyway."

"Yes; just a few weeks more."

"I wish mine were." She was reckless again. "Do you know what I'd do in your place, Bob Enderby, as soon as my job was done? You're a hearty little shaker." She grinned, wriggling her bruised shoulders. "Well, I'd shake the dust of this rotten hole off my feet and never come back again."

"Is that what you're thinking about for yourself?" he queried unguardedly.

"Would you advise me to?" came the quick retort.

"I'd never advise you in anything about your own affairs, Ricky. You know too much about yourself to need any advice. You understand yourself better than any one I've ever known."

"Morbid introspection, it's called, when one isn't feeling polite. I've had to stop it. It just doesn't work any more. I'd rather worry about other people's woes. Yours, for instance. Don't you think my advice to you is sound?"

"Do you think I ought to take it?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "For your own interests I surely do."

"Do you want me to take it?"

"Ah, that's different."

"All the difference in the world," he agreed cheerfully.

She held him with her direct, unafraid gaze. "Bobby, if you go—after you go," she corrected herself, "I don't quite see how I'm going to stand a Habersham full of nothing but Ruylands. It just won't seem inhabitable without either you or Norval."

"I see. I'm elected to take Norval's place."

"Not that, quite," said she quickly and unguardedly,

and felt the color flush, tingling to her cheeks. It was not Norval's place, but another's who had so disastrously failed her, to which her needs and her loneliness of spirit were insistently calling Robert Enderby. In sheer defensiveness she made her tone light as she added: " 'When a feller needs a friend,' you know. And I'm certainly the feller, right now."

"Then it's just as well that my business connections with Habersham promise to become permanent."

"Permanent? How's that? Bobby, have you been hiding something from me?"

He put on an air of extreme and unconvincing innocence. "I've acquired a small interest in the company."

"The Ruyland Paper Company? You! How?"

"Josephus's stock. I bought it."

"What on earth for? It isn't worth anything, a small block like that, to an outsider."

"Not much, as a present investment, perhaps. But I thought I'd like to keep a finger in the local pie. Maybe I'm developing a hunch for interference, myself."

"Does the Grandante know?"

"No. Josephus won't tell, and the transfer is in my lawyer's name. You could use the stock if it ever should be any use to you."

She stared. "How could it?"

"It would give you entry to the meetings."

"What does that amount to? Everything important is decided at the inner councils of the family. The meetings are just the rubber-stamp finish."

"I suppose that's so," he assented, crestfallen.

"Bobby, did you buy in just to be of help to me?"

"Oh, no, no!" he assured her with elaborate casualness. "I wanted the stock anyway, and it occurred to me that as I had it, if it was needed, I could turn it over to you or Ruyland to vote as you chose."

"To Kennion?" she murmured, startled.

"Why, yes. It might be more convenient for you that way, if you didn't want to mix up in things personally, mightn't it?"

She could not tell him that her growing distrust of her husband had come to include even his factory relations.

"Of course," she said. "Bobby, you're a dear. But I've never really had any part in the business end, except a little in Factory Three. And now that's over."

"It needn't be entirely over," he explained. "If you're going to keep up your interest in Choral Three—"

"I've got to," she muttered, recalling her promises to Norval.

"Then having the stock in your control will give you a chance to know what's going on, at least; and if it comes to a fight—"

"Between Mrs. Ruyland and me?"

"Yes; that's bound to come if you stay in Habersham, isn't it?"

"I'll stay," she asserted doggedly, "if it's only to show her that she and all the Ruylands on earth can't drive me out until I get ready to go."

"There's something else." He spoke with the difficulty of embarrassment. "She seems to have a way of knowing everything that's going on."

"Paid spies. But she's lost her best one."

"And, considering that she's showing so much curiosity about us—"

"You think we ought not to go on seeing each other," she helped him out.

"Well—"

"Afraid of being compromised, Bobby?"

"Don't be rotten, Ricky!"

"I smiled when I said it, didn't I? Now listen to me: You're the only thing I've got here that isn't a Ruyland

of one sort or another. I'm going to see just as much of you as I can, just as openly as I choose, until you get bored—don't interrupt—and, as for Augusta Ruyland, you know where she can go. And so does she." To herself she added, "We'll see what Kennion has got to say about *that*."

Kennion said nothing.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE strike was on.

Choral Three began it. The chorus came to rehearsal one evening, only to find all doors barred with hastily constructed carpentry. Notices, in the name of the Company, forbade disturbance or entry; the Company had assumed control until further notice, under its reserved rights in the leasehold. What had happened was plain enough; Augusta Ruyland had discovered Ben Ainsworth's continued incumbency of his place in the club and had countered with characteristic directness and finality against this defiance of her orders. The notices, neatly typed by Miss Owen, were signed in the familiar, flourishing chirography of the Chieftainess. An alarm bell at dead of night could not have spread the tidings or rallied the loyal more swiftly than the news went forth by the mysterious wireless of rumor. Within an hour every available member of the club was with the chorus before the barred building.

No leader volunteered. None was necessary. Singing, they tore down the bars and burst in the doors. A force of defending watchmen appeared. Singing, they battered them and threw them out. Singing, they fortified the place and stood an all-night siege by a portion of the Habersham police force, incited, directed, and at times denounced for inactivity, cowardice and disloyalty, by Augusta Ruyland who raged mightily in the forefront of battle. One of those inspired and lamentable poetasters who invariably rise to the occasion in such crises, had spent a laborious night concocting a song to

the fiery music of the "March of the Men of Harlech" (there was a strong smattering of Welsh in the club), wherein "Choral Three" rhymed with "victor-ee," and the noble sentiment was enunciated that "no Ruyland" should tyrannize over "*my* land."

Still singing and more terrible than an army with banners, Choral Three sallied forth when the morning whistles blew for the opening of the factories, broke the police lines, with some but not serious loss to its ranks, for the singing element was strategically protected on all sides by a fighting square, and marched upon Factory Three.

They sang out Factory Three.

Augmented by the hundreds thus added, they sang out Factory Six and Factory Two.

Factory Five caught the contagion before the army moved vocally upon it and sang itself out. It sang pretty badly but the result was the same.

Factory Four, a weak organization of low wage-scale, hung back. Choral Three did not sing them out; it pulled them out by the hair of the head, mostly long. By this time Factory One had deemed it wise to join the movement and Factory Seven fell into line. The noon whistles blew; they might as well have saved their steam. Not a workman or workwoman was left to accept the release. The great Ruyland plant, for the second time in its existence, wholly stopped work. Choral Three had unbuilt Nineveh with its singing.

Messengers, meantime, had been trying to locate Fredericka Ruyland. Since its founder's death, she had been, in spite of her resignation from the Board, the tacitly recognized guide and leader of the club, which she could not, in loyalty to the promise exacted by the forethoughtful Norval, have refused to be. They wanted her support, advice, approval. She was located finally in New

York; had left suddenly the previous afternoon on some urgent and unknown business; was now as urgently recalled. A delegation met her at the afternoon train. In it was Vignon, Vignon his very self, foremost of the nation's choral leaders, with his head in a bandage, for he had been in the van of the fight (having come down from Boston for this special rehearsal) and had been hit by a falling scantling. He rushed to Fredericka, seized her hands, kissed them, announced magnificently:

"I will stand by your Choral Three! My time which is worth one hundred, two hundred dollars a day, is yours, gratis! The press shall ring with this outrage." He patted the bandage and struck an attitude.

Fredericka thanked him, not insensible to the value of the sentimental publicity accruing from an injury sustained by the great artist "in the cause." But what she really wanted was not heroics, but information. It was the last thing she seemed likely to get from the Choral Three delegation, all of whom were talking at once. She tried to appease them.

"Yes; I'll come. I'll be with you in an hour—no, two hours. I've got to have a little time to myself first."

Back of the turbulent, exalted crowd, she had seen Ransome Case and Elberta. She broke through to them.

"Take me home, you two," she begged. "And tell me about it as we go."

"Isn't it wonderful!" cried Elberta, her face alight.

"I don't know yet whether it is or not," returned the other. "Give me the whole thing, will you, Ransome, and do it slowly. I've had about all my poor little brain will stand, this last twenty-four hours."

He gave her a succinct account of the outbreak at the club.

"But that doesn't explain the general strike. I understand all the factories are out."

"So they are. That's been smoldering these three months, ever since the trouble over Borck's meeting. Every factory except Four had a representative at that meeting who was summarily fired. There you have your nucleus of trouble for each one, and the Grandante's barred doors at the club did the rest. After Factory Three went out it was all off. You know the sentiment of the others for Three."

Fredericka understood. Factory Three was the keystone of the organization even more in the social than in the industrial sense. There was manufactured the famous Ruyland Bond paper which had carried the name of Habersham and the Ruylands out among the nations. Men were born into an inheritance of Factory Three jobs, as into expectation of admittance to limited schools or ancient clubs, and Choral Three had further enhanced the repute of the factory, and through it of the whole plant, giving it the special glamor of recognized artistry. Hence a blow at Choral Three fell heavy upon the *amour propre* of the Ruyland workers as a whole, which was quite as definite a sentiment as the *amour propre* of the Ruylands themselves. There would be no easy composition of this fight.

"And you're the one that's really responsible for it all!" cried Elberta. "You must feel like—like Jeanne d'Arc."

Fredericka did not feel like Jeanne d'Arc. For the moment she felt like a very small, helpless, unfriended girl upon whom appallingly unforeseen responsibilities had descended. Into her memory shot that sad and terrific accusation of the betrayed Arthur which Augusta Ruyland had quoted against her: was she, indeed, to be the unwitting, unwilling agency of "red ruin and the breaking up of laws"?

She bade the two lovers good-by with her thanks, went

to her room and took the coldest bath she could stand. Then she walked down to the gully to join her fellows of Choral Three. An armed police guard was around the club house. It was even said that Augusta Ruyland was there in person, bearing the old-fashioned revolver with which she had once killed a workman. The more hot-headed element were for storming the club and resuming possession; but Fredericka put a stop to that talk. They must do nothing that would put them in the wrong. Even though Mrs. Ruyland might have exceeded her personal authority, the right of the Company to close the property was, unfortunately, clear. They must wait.

"Unionize," called a voice. "Christian Børck is back," said some one else. Other voices took up the word: "Unionize! Unionize!"

Fredericka shook her head. She was uncertain how to meet that question. Perhaps it was the best move, if Augusta Ruyland could be brought to terms by no less a threat. Rather than sacrifice Choral Three, Fredericka was quite ready to play in with Børck. But first she wished to test a weapon, whose possession she was not yet ready to avow to her associates. As a preliminary step she must consult Kennion. But, how to find him? He was probably, she learned, at a hastily gathered family conference. There she located him by phone. Would he be home to dinner? Yes, said Kennion, surprised that she was back from New York.

"You found my message," she began at once upon his arrival, "telling you that I'd been called to New York and would be gone over night?"

"Yes."

"Do you want to know what I was doing?"

"As you wish, Freddy," said he negligently.

She was curious about him, this man whose wife she had been for more than a year, whose thoughts and feel-

ings and motives were so little understood by her. "Did you think I had gone to Mother's?"

"I don't know what I thought about it."

"I hadn't. Mother doesn't get back till next week. I went to a hotel. And my business in New York was to see Mr. Russell of Russell, Russell & King."

"Meaning nothing to me."

"They're a law firm."

He looked startled. "Your lawyers?"

"No. Norval's. They sent for me. Kennion, Norval has left me his stock in the Ruyland Paper Company."

"All of it?"

"All of it."

For lengthening seconds there was silence between them. "How long have you known of it, if it's a fair question?"

"Perfectly fair. I learned of it yesterday. He probably wrote me about it in the letter that your aunt destroyed."

"Yes; that was a bad break of Aunt Augusta's," he murmured.

"He gave it to me so that I should have some means of protecting Choral Three."

"Against the Grandante?"

"It doesn't say so. But—"

"It comes in very convenient just now," said he, with as near an approach to grimness as she had ever seen in his smile.

"No one here knows of it but you, so it couldn't have anything to do with the strike, if that's what you mean," she returned. "I suppose that Mrs. Ruyland will fight its legality. Mr. Russell warned me that it was doubtful."

"Aunt Augusta try to break a Ruyland will! You don't know her if you think that. She'd as soon blow

up The Rock. There has never been a Ruyland vs. Ruyland case on the docket except that one divorce suit."

"Shall I take the stock?"

His face was inscrutable. "What do you want me to say?"

"Shall I take the stock, Kennion?" she repeated.

"If I said no, would you refuse the bequest?"

"I—don't—know."

He shrugged. "You'd better take it."

Kennion's wife thought: he hasn't even the courage to forbid me.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

AT Augusta Ruyland's introductory statement, "I intend to be perfectly reasonable about this," the family council settled back with varying degrees of despair, submission, and contrariety upon their faces. When the Head of the clan openly professed reasonableness, there was no dealing with her upon any human basis.

The sub-chieftains had been summoned to The Rock, ostensibly to consider the strike; in reality to be informed as to what the Grandante proposed to do so that they might be guided accordingly in all their actions and speech. It was an unusually large gathering. Not only were all the factory heads there, with the other regulars, but Selah B. had put in a most unexpected appearance. Mary Hale was there representing the twins. Norval's widow had come, and even Keedrick Ruyland, an extremely aged person of forty, whose sole interest in the Company's affairs had, up to that point, been comprised in drawing a steady and considerable dividend. He was the acknowledged pundit of the clan. Augusta Ruyland always manifested toward him a sort of tolerant awe, because he had once written a brochure upon the *Menaechmi* of Plautus, which was regarded by all good Ruylands as a beacon of erudition, shedding a luster of scholarship upon the name, although it had failed to thrill the academic world, and one distinguished but mean-spirited critic had pointed out that the commentator could never have read the play in the original. Keedrick was a martyr to hay fever and wept throughout the proceedings.

"The strike must be beaten," said Augusta Ruyland. "The spirit of rebellion and trades unionism has got to be stamped out now and forever." She sat down. The final word had been spoken, the inviolable decision rendered. Now, let the others babble!

"If Norval had been alive—" began Mahlon Ruyland.

"He would have done as I have done," cut in the Grandante. She had not the slightest doubt of the truth of her words. Norval had been a reasonable man; her course was the only reasonable course to pursue; therefore Norval would certainly have followed it. Nothing could be simpler. Out of courtesy to her grief, she turned to Norval's widow. "Don't you agree with me, Anne?"

The widow nodded. She always agreed with Augusta Ruyland. It was the line of least resistance. Besides, to do anything else would be rank heresy.

"Norval was deeply interested in Choral Three," said Mahlon.

"Choral Three is a mere incident," was the disdainful retort. "If you think that this revolt began with Choral Three, you're a fool, Mahlon."

"How did it begin, Aunt Augusta?" ventured the twin.

"With the black ingratitude of workingmen who owe everything they have and are to the Ruylands, supported, I am sorry to say—I am *very* sorry to say—by one who bears the Ruyland name, and whom I will not designate here." She looked pointedly and pityingly at Kennion, who said nothing.

"Good men, some of them, weren't they?" put in Selah B. "Faithful workers and all that, Augusta?"

"I suppose you are going to suggest that I take them back," she returned witheringly. "Is that your idea?"

"There ought to be some basis on which to work toward an understanding. What do you think, Calvert?"

"It's very serious, very serious," boomed Ruyland-Marsh. "Very serious, indeed!" he clinched his verdict, and wiped a sweating brow, though The Rock was always kept at a low temperature.

"You're scared, Calvert," was the Grandante's opinion, delivered after a painfully prolonged consideration of his imposing person. "As for you, Selah, you may go back to your roses now with a clear conscience and leave the conduct of the business to those who swink over it three hundred and sixty-five days in the year to your one."

"Thank you; I'll stay," responded the floriculturist, turning red, for the stroke was a shrewd one.

"Then hold your tongue, if you've nothing better than confusion to contribute," snapped the Grandante, who was beginning to lose her temper under this unprecedented show of opposition. Her annoyance was not mollified at catching a sardonic murmur of, "Perfect reasonableness!" from Mahlon. "Any one else want to unburden his mind?" she demanded.

The scholarly and asthmatic Keedrick emitted a combination choke and wheeze from which the key-words, "losses" and "dividends" protruded vocally.

"There'll be no losses to you," she soothed him with contemptuous reassurance. "They'll all be crawling back for their jobs in a week. Isn't that your opinion, Calvert?"

"No," said Ruyland-Marsh so positively that she quite jumped.

"Why not?" she challenged.

"They're really very much incensed over your treatment of Coleson and Ainsworth and the other older men," warned Ruyland-Marsh with unusual boldness. "They've been with us for so long, and their fathers before them—"

"Don't try to tell me anything about my own people. Don't you think I know 'em better than you? They're my *friends*, those men. But they've got to be disciplined, just as a fractious child has to be disciplined. They knew what they were doing when they violated the Company's orders. I'd given 'em fair warning."

"Who issued those orders?" came a sulky mutter from somewhere back of her.

"Who said that?" cried Augusta Ruyland, whirling around.

"I did." It was Peter W., 3d. Another voice of rebellion!

"I issued them. Have you any objections?"

Before Peter W., 3d's next mutter became interpretable, Keedrick, with a premonitory sneeze, managed to make himself understood to the effect that any present interruption to the prosperity of the concern would be "lamentable, quite lamentable."

"Would you have done differently, you—you dividend-bleater," she snapped, all her respect for his scholarship swallowed up in righteous wrath.

"Just the same," put in Mahlon's dry voice, "we owe some consideration to men like Coleson and Ainsworth. Loyalty isn't all on one side."

"Consideration! Loyalty!" The Grandante's voice was blazing. "Have any of you got brains enough to remember back to the break in prices five—six years ago? How many plants kept running, wholly or partly? Well, this one did. We never cut for a day. Wages went on in full. And your dividends didn't stop, did they? But I walked, that year, because one of the horses died and I couldn't afford another. And I turned two dresses and pawned the Ruyland sapphires—didn't know that I wore glass duplicates for two years, did you. Selah, or you, Keedrick?—so that Sam Coleson's eighty

a week and Ben Ainsworth's seventy-five wouldn't have to be cut."

"Didn't you remind them of that, Aunt Augusta, when they were so horrid about the meeting?" chattered the twin.

"Remind 'em of what I'd done for them! Let 'em remind themselves. The dirty ingrates!"

"Every factory is organized, I understand," said John Ruyland timidly. "I know my men are. Women, too."

"Will their organizations feed 'em?" gibed the Grandante.

"The unions might," suggested Peter W., 3d, and drew his head in between his shoulders like an endangered turtle.

"What unions?"

"Peter is right," averred Mahlon. "If the strike lasts nothing can keep the men out of Borck's hands."

The Grandante's doubled fists clashed together. There was the bitterness of remorse in her voice as she said: "That man Borck! I ought to have had him clapped into jail instead of inviting him home and giving him my good whiskey. But he did know American genealogy," she sighed. "He told me facts about some of our oldest families that I've never even heard whispered." Indeed, the archives of the Conspiracy had been enriched by some scandalous chronicles of the most superior interest as a result of that conclave of kindred spirits.

"He's due to-morrow, I hear," proffered Kennion.

"If he sets foot on the property I'll shoot him with my own hand."

"And make a martyr of him," concluded Selah B., unpleasantly. "Possibly you think that is the way to check unionization."

"Unionization!" she snorted. "What will that do for

them? They'll get their bellies full of union, if they take that tack, and empty of everything else. Soup kitchens!" She put all the venom of her contempt into the traditional threat of her kind. "That's what unionism means. A month of soup, after their money gives out, and they'll save us the trouble by hanging Borck to the nearest lamp-post. Unless he runs away first as they generally do."

"This is getting us nowhere," declared Mahlon. "I think we should take up this matter of Choral Three club house."

"What is there to take up?"

"It is doubtful whether we have cause enough to close it—"

"Not a doubt in the world."

"—under the terms of the leasehold," pursued the unregenerate Mahlon, "Ruyland Tompkins tells me—"

"You have been to *my* lawyer," demanded the old lady in outraged tones, "without consulting me?"

"I have been to the Company's lawyer. Tompkins tells me—"

"I don't care what he tells you. The club is closed and it stays closed."

Selah B. stood up. "In that case there is nothing further to be said here. We'll have to thrash it out at the meeting."

The stare with which she swept him up and down was an achievement in quiet insolence. So, also, was the bland drawl in which she inquired: "What meeting?"

"The meeting of the Company to consider this crisis."

"There is no crisis, and there will be no meeting."

"But, Cousin Augusta," boomed Ruyland-Marsh, his vast face working with apprehension, "without in any way wishing to oppose your views—"

"The regular meeting takes place next month. Any-

thing that any one wishes to bring up then will be duly considered."

"Five weeks!" exclaimed the new head of Factory Three despairingly.

Augusta Ruyland rose to her feet, swept to the door, pivoted slowly about and surveyed the circle of disturbed Ruyland faces. "I've always known that we Ruylands bred fools sometimes," said she. "I never knew before that we breed cowards. I bid you good day."

The conference broke up in confusion.

Inconsiderable matters such as strikes, threats of unionization, and the like, could not be permitted to interrupt the zealous routine of Augusta Ruyland's personal life. From the family conference she went to her round of calls and errands, stopped at the hospital to give some directions as chairman of the board, delivered a consignment of old and rare books to the library, dropped in to assure Jenny Tripp, whose boy had gotten into jail on some charge of truancy, that the matter would be fixed up, put the finishing touches on her marketing, and, on her way back to the carriage, made the astonishing discovery that the faithful Carter was not there. (It afterward developed that he had mistaken his orders.)

"Where," inquired Mrs. Ruyland of the empty air and the world at large, "has that damn nigger gone?"

Although the query was certainly not addressed to him, Sam Coleson, just about starting up his flivver which stood at the curb, felt it incumbent upon him to answer it.

"I don't know, ma'am," said he. He took off his hat and looked at her doubtfully.

The Grandante's eyes twinkled. Sam was so obviously ill at ease; so plainly doubtful as to the social procedure proper to a meeting between a striking workman and his offended employer. She did not leave him long in doubt.

"Well, what are you standing there like a ninkum for?" she demanded.

He changed his hat from one hand to the other with a helpless gesture and batted his eyes.

"Expect me to *walk* home?" inquired the old lady with asperity.

"Get in," said Coleson, greatly relieved, and cranked the machine.

As the car stopped before the bridge entrance, "Got over your foolishness yet, Sam?" asked the passenger.

"It ain't foolishness, Mrs. Ruyland," he protested. "You don't understand the new ideas—"

"I understand 'em all I want to."

"If you'd let me come and talk to you."

"What about?"

"This strike."

"I have nothing to say to you about it."

Coleson looked disconsolate. "I thought maybe some evening when you wasn't busy—"

"Any time you feel like dropping in for a game of chess," she acceded promptly. "Though," she added, "I think you're hardly a match for me any more."

"You make me sick!" he rasped. "Those new book tricks of yours won't get you far after I've had time to figure 'em out."

"Telephone me when you want to try it," was the assured rejoinder. "But—no strike talk. Thank you for the lift, Sam."

"You're welcome and hearty. Say, Mrs. Ruyland." He regarded her with an appeal in his face which met with a suspicious and uncompromising frown.

"Well. Don't stand gawking there. Say it!"

"Is there going to be anybody at The Rock this evening? Police or anything like that?"

"I'll be there," said Augusta Ruyland superbly.

"Alone?"

"You mean well, Sam Coleson," she returned, getting his meaning at once. "But you may tell them for me that they can't scare *me*, and they'd better have a care of themselves if they do come."

At eleven o'clock they came, the serenaders; two hundred of the younger and more reckless element, including twenty-odd singers from Choral Three. They sang the poetaster's song of defiance, and "Hail, hail! The gang's all here!" and were trying to recall something more militant and opprobrious, when a bulb in the tower flashed alight and a dark figure appeared on the wall high above them.

"There she is!" shouted a voice. An expectant "Sshh—sshh—shh!" ran through the little mob, as the head of all the Ruylands lifted a white hand in the dimness.

"You'd better go home," said she coldly.

"Do you own the streets?" rose the taunt, and a roar followed.

A thin shaft of flame pierced the night. Augusta Ruyland had shot into the air.

"She's shootin' at us," cried a man's voice; and added, in a tone of amazed respect, "The old—" There was a pause, and the voice concluded firmly with an aspirated monosyllable of such Elizabethan potency that it was worthy of the Grandante's own most exalted moments.

Something unseen hurtled through the air. There was a crash a few feet from the lone figure, and the missile rolled bumpily on the floor of the tower.

"I'll pay a thousand dollars," promised the clear voice, "for proof of who threw that stone."

"Don't you wisht you knew!" jeered a woman.

"Go home, Mary Ray," said the lone figure. "Go home, all of you. The next shot won't be in the air. One—two—"

They broke and scuttled around the angle of the wall.

The Grandante walked into the tower. She picked up the rock from the floor and stood glaring at it as if it might be intimidated into revealing the secret of the thrower.

Miss Owen was awaiting her within, white-clad, white-faced, and pop-eyed.

"What's happened? Are you hurt? I've telephoned the police."

"Nothing's happened. You're a fool. Go to bed."

Augusta Ruyland went to bed, herself, and slept like a lamb.

CHAPTER THIRTY

AUGUSTA RUYLAND was not one of those who cheaply bear rancor. That was for lesser folk. In that state and condition to which it had pleased an all-wise Providence to call her, she meted out rebuke and punishment with what she regarded as even-handed justice. To cherish wrath after the chastisement had been inflicted would be both illogical and unworthy. If the objects of her justice nursed imaginary grievances, that was their concern; she would not dignify such pettiness by according it recognition. In pursuance of this policy, she had since the episode of Norval's funeral, made no difference in her attitude toward Fredericka on the occasion of their few and casual meetings. Had Kennion's wife challenged her on the subject of her denunciation, she would even have gone so far as to admit that she had been carried a little beyond her intent, by the temptations of her own oratory, while reasserting the essential justice of her action. She was always just, in her own opinion and intention!

That she would inevitably come into conflict again with the girl, over the Choral Three crisis, was plain. When the issue came, she proposed to crush Fredericka's preposterous pretensions once and for all. Meantime, she saw no reason for admitting any alteration in their mutual bearing. It was quite without self-consciousness that she went to Kennion's house on the afternoon before his birthday.

Mrs. Kennion Ruyland was out, the maid informed

her, not mentioning that her mistress had escaped from the side door as the barouche drew up at the front.

"Very well, Maggie. I'll go up to Mr. Kennion's room for a moment."

Being Habersham born and bred, Maggie did not for an instant entertain the thought of protesting any purpose of Mrs. Augusta Ruyland's. Moreover, she understood the purport of the visit from the package under Mrs. Ruyland's arm; she was bringing a birthday gift for Kennion. The Grandante's anniversary gifts were usually homely and often the work of her own hands. This one was a balsam pillow.

She unwrapped it, fluffed up the ribbons, and set it at the head of Kennion's bed where it exhaled a spiced breath. Having sniffed appreciatively, she made a tour of inspection about the room. Everything seemed to be as it should be. She lifted a book from the stand; no dust beneath it. She examined the folds of the window draperies, pulled a picture out from the wall to peer behind it, even bent her back, still supple from cold baths and systematic morning calisthenics, to glance under the bed, presumably to see whether last night's burglar had been swept out. All was specklessly correct. Certainly it must be admitted that the housekeeping was expert; the Grandante's sense of justice allowed that much. Assured that Fredericka's own room would be equally in apple-pie order (one may be permitted a doubt as to whether the Grandante or anybody else had ever seen a really orderly apple pie, but such was the simile which sprang naturally to her mind), she nevertheless thought that she would take just a peek through the connecting door.

She opened the door; that is to say, she performed those motions to which one expects a door to respond by opening. This door remained closed.

"Well!" said Augusta Ruyland.

There are more ways of saying "Well" than are taught in all the rhetorics; even in New England where the word is one of the verbal necessities of life, Augusta Ruyland's rendition could hardly have failed to be reckoned an achievement in dialectics. Apparently she herself thought highly of it for she immediately repeated it. She stood scowling at the door, but it remained unmoved.

Curiosity was not a vice of the Grandante, but she was a determined and thorough character and this was a matter about which she had a right to be certain. Stoozing, she applied her eye to the keyhole. Half a chair and a bright section of window space sprang into view. The key was not on the other side, then. She tried the door again, this time with more insistence. Bolted. On further experimentation she thought that she could see the bolt.

Augusta Ruyland turned her steps toward the stairway. She wanted to get out of that childless house.

A short, dumpy woman with a plain and placid face came to meet her in the lower hall.

"You are Augusta Ruyland, aren't you?"

"I am Mrs. Hasleton Ruyland."

"Won't you come in?" The little woman indicated the library entrance. Mrs. Ruyland entered, lifting and placing her feet in the manner of a distrustful cat opening negotiations with a dog that may or may not be friendly. She decided to sit down but did so warily.

"Have a cigarette?" invited the other, extending a leather case.

"Certainly *not*."

"But you don't object to smoking, I hope."

"I do."

"In that case—" She put the case aside. "It is so soothing to the nerves," she murmured regretfully.

"I am not nervous," announced the formidable Grandante.

"How fortunate!" said the little woman. Mrs. Ruyland speculated as to whether that was as congratulatory as it sounded; she suspected that it wasn't. "You don't remember me, do you?"

"No," said Mrs. Ruyland, knowing perfectly well who the stranger was.

"When I first knew and admired you, I was a little girl, on a visit to your cousins, the Mynderse Ruylands," said the other with a disarming smile. "And you were the stately Miss Augusta Ruyland." Stately is a term not loosely to be applied to the generality of people; but it had suited the far-away young maidenhood to which the Grandante's memory now flashed back.

"Who were you?" she asked curiously.

"I was Anna Louise Demorest. I'm Mrs. Gage now; Fredericka's mother."

"The Demorests of Spuyten Duyvil?" queried the other with quick interest.

"Yes. The railroads have swallowed up the old mansion if you remember it."

"I've just been hearing some extraordinary stories about goings-on in that house a few generations ago," began the Grandante; then checked herself at the remembrance that Christian Borck's genealogical revelations in that respect had been far from decorous. In fact, quite in the nature of a *chronique scandaleuse*.

Mrs. Gage laughed.

"Yes. Some of my people went rather apace. I believe they even led one of the early Ruylands astray from the paths of sobriety and propriety."

"He came back to the fold," grinned the Grandante,

"and died leaving a snug fortune and eight children, as good Ruylands should. As they don't nowadays," she added. Her face darkened as she thought of the bolted door overhead.

"Still, enough of you remain to carry on," remarked Mrs. Gage, fingering her cigarette case absently.

"Oh, go on and smoke!" barked Mrs. Ruyland. "I only objected to be unpleasant."

"That's what I supposed." She lighted up. The Grandante relaxed in her chair, taking some fine lace-work from her reticule, upon which she became active, remarking that she had her own bad habits. The two women mutually understood, without further parley, that they were going to understand each other.

"Did you do that before Fredericka was born?" queried the old lady, indicating the cigarette.

"Looking for pre-natal influences?" chuckled the other. "That's quite outmoded, you know. Modern science doesn't take any stock in it. What we must be, we are, Ruylands or otherwise."

"You are telling me that I'm not to expect any change in Fredericka," was the Grandante's interpretation.

"I am telling you not to expect her to change into a Ruyland by the mere accident of having married one."

"It was an accident; a bad accident."

"But not necessarily a fatal one. Marriages aren't fatal, though we used to consider them so in our time."

"In my time we thought them final, at least. But what is your time? You seem pretty modern in your sympathies."

"I'm trying to keep up with Fredericka. Did you ever try it with Kennion?"

"I wouldn't be guilty of such silly nonsense."

"Oh, it wouldn't be so difficult. Kennion is pretty

much of a Ruyland. His modernism is only the veneer of his European experience. Perhaps that's the real trouble with our precious pair of youngsters."

"No; it's worse than that. Fredericka was never really in love with Kennion."

"You're shrewd, Mrs. Ruyland. But you're wrong, there. She was in love with him, though as to whether she ever loved him as she might love is another matter, in spite of the fact that she thinks she did."

"As she *does* love some one else?"

"As she will love, one day, please God, Kennion or another."

"Would the other be this young Enderby?" queried the Grandante penetratingly.

Mrs. Gage flicked her cigarette into the fireplace and leaned forward. "I think you had better explain that."

The old lady tossed her head. "I am quite willing. They are constantly seen together in public."

"In public," echoed Mrs. Gage.

"If they are seen in public," said Mrs. Ruyland, "you may be sure they are together when nobody sees them or knows what they are doing."

"I don't follow your reasoning," said the mother. "If, indeed, it be reasoning." Her voice was so quiet that the intrepid Grandante paused. Then, "She has bolted the door between her room and Kennion's," said she defensively.

"I see. You go upon the theory that if it isn't one man, it must be another. Yet you were a widow while you were still quite young, Augusta Ruyland."

The Grandante flushed furiously. "I— How dare you!"

"You were inferring certain behavior by my daughter," placidly pointed out Mrs. Gage. "But when I apply the same rule to you it seems to shock you."

"It isn't the same thing," protested the other, jarred by this relentless logic. "This is an immoral age."

"Do you really believe that?"

"Don't you? Why, immorality is in the very air, these days."

"What kind of immorality?"

"Are you going to split hairs with me?" demanded the Grandante. "There is only one standard and one kind of immorality."

"Oh, loads of kinds!" contradicted the little woman cheerily. "There's meanness and backbiting, and malice and all uncharitableness, and trying to run other people's lives for 'em as if they were our own—I'm not sure that that doesn't make more trouble in the world than lots of things supposed to be much worse—and disloyalty, and—"

"I'm talking about immorality," broke in the old lady with something of the desperation of a mind floundering in verbal quicksands. "*The* immorality."

"Your favorite immorality," interpreted Mrs. Gage. "Oh, I don't mean the one that you practice, but the one that you most like to think about."

"Well, *upon* my word!" gasped the old lady. Her mind ceased to flounder and resigned itself to its fate. What was this inconceivable person going to say next?

"As for Freddy," pursued Freddy's mother, "I don't think you need worry about her at present. Freddy isn't likely to be immoral, in your sense. At least, not without fair notice. She's too honest to cheat."

"She's the product of her age, though," said the Grandante, who occasionally borrowed the phraseology of the serious magazines.

"This poor, abused, hurrying, breathless, afraid-of-missing-something age! We don't understand its manners, therefore we suspect its morals. I don't believe

that morals in general change much in the span of any one lifetime. Not even sexual morals."

At the adjective the Grandante gave a little, spinsterish jump, which would have done credit to Miss Owen. "There are some subjects that were not discussed among ladies when I was a girl," she pronounced.

"Were there? I never heard of them," was the unmoved response. "You probably used different words when you talked about 'em, but I imagine that you discussed exactly the same things with exactly the same thrill. It's not really a question of morals, you see, but one of standards."

"You make my head buzz," complained the Grandante. "Do you actually expect me to believe that these young people to-day are exactly the same as the young people of my time?"

"Not at all. Nor of mine, for that matter. That's a delusion fostered by parents too lazy or too timid to tackle the problem. No, indeed; they're quite a different breed of cats, these youngsters. It's only in fundamentals that they stay the same. Appetites and temptations and sins and penalties are just about as they were any time these few centuries."

"Not penalties," said the older woman quickly.

"You caught me there. We're more charitable, it's true, nowadays. Score one for the present."

"We're looser."

"We've got to be. You can't drive this generation on a tight rein. They know too much. And they want to know more. More freedom and less authority is what they're after."

"Undisciplined." Augusta Ruyland's lips grew thin and straight as a schoolmaster's ferule.

"Perhaps. But life will discipline them. Life is the

only pedagogue that can. You can't handle Nineteen-twenty from the standpoint of Eighteen-seventy. It's a different world, thank God!"

"It was a better world then," declared the Grandante with religious conviction.

"For us, perhaps. But these young people would smother in it. Oh, they'll have to take their medicine, too, but not in a spoon rammed down their throats by their grandmothers. Do you know"—Mrs. Gage leaned forward with a twinkle which, for the first time, reminded the other of Fredericka—"what the real motto of the younger generation is? 'We'll try anything once.'"

"Yes; everything is a gamble with them," said the Grandante with sudden clarity of appreciation. "Even marriage."

"I'm afraid they have shot that ancient institution pretty full of holes," admitted the other with a rueful smile.

"Look at this pair of ours." The Grandante jerked an indignant thumb toward the upper floor. "Fredericka is tired of her experiment after only a year and a half of it. Just about the time when she ought to be having her first baby."

"Have you told her that?" queried the other with an expression undecipherable to the Grandante.

"More than once."

"Ah! Don't you understand how she would resent that? That she'd consider such meddling an indelicacy more offensive than any immorality would seem to you?"

"And now the woman is accusing me of indelicacy!" the astounded old lady informed the universe. "Me!"

"Oh, no; I'm not accusing you of anything, Mrs. Ruyland. I understand your attitude." There was a

quality of pity in her smile which annoyed the other very much. "But I despair of making Freddy understand you."

"It isn't in the least necessary that she should," the Grandante gave lofty assurance. "I understand her. Thoroughly. . . . What were you saying then?"

(Mrs. Gage had merely murmured, "God save the king!" but deemed it superfluous to repeat the invocation.)

"I'm going to tell you something?" went on Mrs. Ruyland, in the manner of one paving the way for startling news. "I *like* your daughter."

The sensation which she had anticipated did not materialize. "I rather like her myself," observed Mrs. Gage.

Once started, the Grandante was willing to go farther. "I may even say that I have a—a sort of respect for her."

("You'd like her better if you could boss her," thought the other, "and respect her less.")

Then the Grandante did furnish a surprise. "You don't suppose," she inquired hopefully, and just a little hesitatingly, "that Fredericka has—er—some Ruyland blood in her veins?"

"*What!*" ejaculated the astounded Mrs. Gage, at a loss for the moment. Then the significance of the question burst upon her in all its gorgeous ingenuousness. Presently she said a bit gaspily, "I'm afraid you're attaching too much importance to an ancient and doubtful scandal, Mrs. Ruyland."

"Christian Borck told me," commenced the Grandante, and subsided from a feeling of delicacy a trifle belated. After all, the woman of the old story was, she supposed, her hearer's direct ancestress.

"No," pursued Mrs. Gage, her lips still twitching.

"Your informant got his data mixed. It was my great-great-aunt, not my great-grandmother who carried on the historic flirtation with that Lothario of your respectable stock, in those good old days whose superior morality, by the way, you think so much of. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but our lineage is clear."

Augusta Ruyland lowered her voice, as was fitting for the heresy she next uttered. "I am willing to admit to you that perhaps there is getting to be too much Ruyland in the stock. Though where," she qualified despairingly, "we are to find any other blood with the same combination of qualities, I'm sure I don't know! Oh, I say nothing against the Demorests," she added apologetically, "even though the old records are rather against them."

"Diedrick Ruyland," murmured Mrs. Gage, as if she had just that moment recalled the name of the corrupted guest of Spuyten Duyvil days.

The Grandante paid her long-dead kinsman's memory the tribute of an annoyed flush. "Every flock has its black sheep," she admitted. "Mrs. Gage," she continued, "I want to keep Fredericka in the family. I want her character and her courage handed down to Ruyland children. I want this marriage fixed up," she appealed.

"So do I," said the other promptly.

"Then you don't think it's very bad."

"I know so little about it yet. Fredericka doesn't quarrel lightly."

"Nobody could quarrel with Kennion," averred his great-aunt.

"Perhaps that is what's the trouble," intimated the other.

Augusta Ruyland started to contradict this before its significance struck in. "It is exasperating sometimes, that easy indifference of his." As the meaning struck in still further, pointed by a smile on Mrs. Gage's plain

and expressive face, she added, "Do you think he's deteriorating in character?"

"What do you think?" countered the cautious Mrs. Gage.

The Grandante became expansive. "I can talk to you. You understand things. We Ruylands are growing to be a soft-fibered race. Oh, I know we don't give that impression. The Dutch in us maintains its type outwardly. But we've had too easy a time of it for too many generations. The blood is getting stale. Look at Norval. Look at Marcus. Look at Josephus, and that flatulent fool, Ruyland-Marsh. I've had to carry the burden and hold the fort for all the family, with mighty little help. Do you know what I feel like? I feel like an old hen with a lot of chickens that will never learn to take care of themselves alone."

Mrs. Gage reflected privately that this fierce old person, whose mysteriously glazed eyes grew absent as she brooded on the problem of her clan, was much more eagle than hen. But she felt the stirrings of a very real sympathy for her, and this was reflected in the smile with which she waited.

"My son would have been the same if he had lived," mused the old woman. "I've always known that, in my heart. But Kennion—I hoped so much from Kennion, and when that hope began to fail, from Kennion's children. You're a knowledgeable woman, Mrs. Gage; you understand these young folks better than I do. What is it that's wrong with my nephew?"

"If I tell you, you won't like it."

"Do I look so thin-skinned?"

"Too much Ruyland, then. Too much great-aunt in particular."

"I knew you were going to say that. Do you expect me to give up my interest in my nephew?"

"Do *you* expect a high-spirited girl like Fredericka to endure quietly having another woman first in her husband's life?"

A gleam of irrepressible pride quickened the face of Augusta Ruyland. In that moment Mrs. Gage knew, deep within her spirit, that the case was hopeless. "I've never tried to be first," protested the Grandante; but there was more exultation than conviction in her tone.

Despite her premonition of failure, the mother went on. "Both of us want to keep this marriage from wreck. My daughter has told me how you go in and out of this house as if it were your own. I know, and not from her alone, what you said at Norval Ruyland's funeral."

"I was wrong," admitted the Grandante, making this unexpected and perhaps unprecedented concession with an effort which racked her. "If you think I ought to apologize—I've never had to do such a thing since I can remember—but, if you think it would help bring them together—"

"What you do now makes very little difference," was the quiet reply. "It was Kennion's failure that hurt."

"How did Kennion fail?"

"Can't you understand what it meant to have him take a neutral attitude after your attack? There was just one thing for him to do and that was to go with his wife out of your house."

Then the lightning flashed. "If he had, he should never have set foot in it again."

"There it is, you see! You must be first or nothing. 'Thou shalt have no other gods—' "

"Please do not be sacrilegious," requested the Grandante with great dignity. Instantly she became, for her, almost humble. "That's past and gone. What is there we can do now?"

"There is just one chance, that I can see. If you will absolutely let them alone for six months or a year—"

"Do you mean that I'm not even to *see* Kennion?"

"Of course that would be best if it were possible."

"Would you do that with Fredericka?" challenged the old woman, prematurely triumphant over what she regarded as a decisive counter.

"Certainly."

"Then you're an unnatural mother," she retorted, vastly discomfited. She rose. "I suppose I shan't see you again," said she with regretful dignity.

Mrs. Gage declined to accept this basis. "Why not? I shall be here for several days."

"But, in view of the situation between your daughter and my nephew—"

"Oh, there's been no quarrel. And if there had, we needn't be drawn into it," argued Mrs. Gage briskly. "I supposed we were to be allies. I hoped we might even be friends."

Mrs. Ruyland's troubled face brightened amazingly. "Why not!" And, with a touch of deprecation: "You couldn't come and dine with me at The Rock this evening, perhaps?"

"I should be charmed," was the prompt response.

Homeward bound, Fredericka beheld the astonishing spectacle of her mother and Augusta Ruyland, seated side by side in the barouche and chatting with animation as Carter turned the horses in at The Rock; but Fredericka was not astonished. She had long since given up being astonished at anything that Mrs. Gage might do. It didn't pay.

Fredericka was in bed that night when a tap on her door, followed by Mrs. Gage's modulated voice, aroused her from the beginnings of sleep.

"Come in," she invited. "Well, motherkin," she railed as the other entered, "have you gone over to the enemy?"

"I'm sitting as judge in this case," returned Mrs. Gage, perching on the foot of the bed. "Impartial, wise, and incorruptible. What is your defense?"

"You might tell me the charge against me first," suggested the reasonable Fredericka.

"Augusta Ruyland considers that you are a disturbing element in the Ruyland life. She complains that, while she could do anything with Kennion before he married you, now he is quite difficult to manage or even understand. Did you ever hear anything quite so sweetly ingenuous!" she chuckled.

"She is an ingenuous old party," confirmed Fredericka.

"I like her."

"You would, darn you! I'd have bet you'd fall for that grim charm of hers."

"It isn't that so much. She's pathetic, that's what she is. She's so alone in the little fortress of grandeur that she's built around herself."

"What have you two been plotting about?"

"You, naturally. Freddy, she's breaking her heart over this trouble."

The girl sat up in bed. "Her *what*? You're getting romantic, Mrs. Gage."

"No; she's really making herself unhappy over your unhappiness."

"I'm not unhappy," rejoined the girl. Her chin thrust itself out. "I'm disillusioned; that's all."

"I believe she'd do anything in the world to bring you and Kennion together."

"Oh, yes! That! She doesn't care anything about our happiness or unhappiness. All she wants is grandchildren."

"Well; so do I," smiled the mother. "All normal women do after they've stopped wanting children of their own. The instinct dies hard."

Fredericka's face grew bitter. "And you want me to rack my body to pieces bearing children to a coward?"

"Are you sure he's that, Freddy?"

"Isn't he? What else do you make of him?"

"You're harsh," charged the mother. "That's the way of youth, sitting in judgment. I'm not so sure he's a coward. I think he's only a Ruyland of a certain type."

"Don't expect me to perpetuate the type, then," retorted the girl.

"I'm not particularly asking or expecting anything. Yes, I am, though. Will you talk to Mrs. Ruyland if she comes to see you?"

"Do you want me to, motherkin?"

"Yes; I do. For both of your sakes."

"All right. I'll do it."

The mother stood up, bent over and kissed the girl, went to the door, then turned. "Freddy, have you talked to Kennion about it?"

"About what?" asked the daughter obstinately.

"Norval's funeral."

"Can you see me asking explanations about that?"

"Hasn't he ever offered any?"

"Not a word. Too ashamed of himself, I suppose."

"Nor—nor about anything else?"

The young wife's eyes followed those of her mother to the bolted door. "Not a word," she repeated.

"Ah, well; perhaps it isn't a situation for words."

With that profound frankness which existed between mother and daughter Fredericka said in a tone of queerly triumphant bitterness: "How long do you think that door would have stood if I'd married Bob Enderby?"

The mother's eyes were grave, but she smiled, and

Fredericka interpreted that smile. "You're right, motherkin. If it had been Bobby the bolt would never have been drawn."

Mrs. Gage ventured: "Think hard, Freddy. Even now, if Kennion broke it down—"

"No," said the girl. "It's too late."

Mrs. Gage shook a sorrowful head. "More's the pity," she said, "for him."

Her daughter sat staring into the darkness which had closed around the withdrawing figure.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

IN the plenitude of her authority, Augusta Ruyland had affirmed: "There will be no meeting." To call a special session for the purpose of considering the strike would be to admit officially the strike's importance. Such a confession of weakness was not in the Grand-ante's character. As long as she refused to dignify opposition by recognizing its existence, it did not exist; that was the gist of her unformulated philosophy; it is perhaps the cornerstone of all despotic governance. Canute will believe in the tide only when he gets his feet wet.

All the factories were, by her express command, kept open. All Ruylands were expected to go, every morning, each to his own open factory, and did so go to sit at open desks, read the opened mail, and struggle to find occupation for that percentage of the clerical staff which had not joined the alleged strike. It was wearisome business. The Ruylands grew bored, then nervous, then heartily discontented; having never done anything but run a peaceable industry peacefully and industriously, they did not know how to dispose of themselves. John, most stodgily Ruylandish of all Ruylands, was rumored to have been seen at the Habersham Club, consuming a pre-luncheon cocktail. It was as bad as that!

Winds of adversity might blow as they listed about the heads of other Ruylands; the Chieftainess held hers high and serene. Not in one least particular did she permit the rebellion to distort her way of life. In the three weeks following the outburst, she allowed herself to be moved to action but once. Her *viva voce* offer to

the serenaders, of a thousand dollars' reward for the betrayal into her hands of the rock-thrower had been followed up by the customary notices posted on the factory bulletins and also upon the barred door of Choral Three club house, thereby adding fuel to the already sufficient flames, and this, in turn, had incited unforeseen retaliation in the form of dodgers liberally scattered around the streets and, by way of special reprisal, affixed to all available spots on The Rock's exterior, headed, "Getting Grandma's Goat," and inquiring solicitously whether she had caught the miscreant yet. Equipped though she was to cope with any other form of defiance or hostility, this was new to her experience. A gibe was a weapon which she had thus far known only from the handle end! The point stung venomously. She completely lost both judgment and temper, had two small-boy distributors arrested, and offered another reward, this time of one hundred dollars, for the discovery of the author or authors of the "outrage." Naturally this encouraged the opposition to produce another publication which, however, was so indecorous that the police suppressed it at the infuriate protest of its victim. The Grandante was in danger of making herself a little ridiculous.

When, one noon, she saw a familiar figure hanging about the driveway entrance, she made a hopeful guess that something had been found out. Dawley Cole did not yet look shabby; there had not been time enough for that. But he bore the appearance of one to whose spiritual discouragement physical shabbiness would be the near sequel in disintegration. She greeted him politely, but he read in the tightened lips the verdict of her righteous and unforgiving resentment.

"Well, Dawley; where have you been? I haven't seen much of you lately."

"No, Cousin Augusta. I've been in New York part of the time."

"Ah? Looking for a position, I suppose. Did you find one?"

"No."

"Strange," she commented, savoring her own malice as she grinned at the unhappy little man. "A person of your unusual capacities should experience no difficulty in marketing them. Have you come to me for a character? I can give you the highest references for everything but loyalty, and perhaps, perhaps the knack of knowing on which side your bread is buttered."

He stood before her, his eyes shifting helplessly, a shamed and tormented creature.

"Well?" she snapped, after a hardened contemplation of his misery. "You came to tell me *something*, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What is it? Out with it! I'll buy if it's worth the price."

"Oh, Cousin Augusta!"

"Oh, Cousin Augusta!" she mocked. But her cold disdain had taken on the warmer tone of anger and was queerly softened by its own heat. "Come inside before you splash my sidewalk up with your tears."

Humbly and on foot, as was appropriate, he followed the lordly carriage up the incline. She took him to the Conspiratory and sat him down before her, studying him with malevolent satisfaction.

"Are you hungry?" she shot at him suddenly. It was the final touch of brutality. The ex-private reporter, summoning the remnant of his pitiful dignity, got up, quite pale.

"Oh, drat the man!" cried the Grandante in another voice. "I can't keep mad with him! Sit down, Dawley,

and tell me about yourself. Have you got anything to do?"

"No, Cousin Augusta. Nothing regular."

"Something irregular, then?" The question was not unkindly.

"I've been doing some odd items for the *Courier*; society notes and that kind of thing. But they won't take me on regularly until—unless—" He floundered into silence, his face quivering doggishly, hopefully.

"I see," said Augusta Ruyland. "You think a letter from me would be helpful."

"It would mean everything."

She understood perfectly. A local society reporter under the ban of her displeasure, as Dawley was known to be, would find the regular avenues of information about Ruyland doings closed to him; and Habersham society news without the Ruylands would be considerably more attenuated than Hamlet with the melancholy prince omitted. Too great to feel her sense of power flattered, she nevertheless began to pity her former gentlemanly spy.

"So you want to trade your information for my support." She lifted a hand against his protest. "Let's see the goods. What did you run across in New York? Something about Fredericka?"

"Oh, no!" said he, startled.

"Kennion, then? He's been away lately more than I understand."

Mr. Cole hesitated. "I did happen to see Kennion, but—Cousin Augusta! Is there any trouble between Kennion and Mrs. Kennion?"

"Are you here to buy or to sell information?" was the grim retort.

"There is something queer," he admitted. "But I'd like a little more time to verify some points. And what

I came to tell you is more important; much more important," he added impressively, "and immediate."

"Doubted. But go ahead."

"There's a Ruyland Company meeting called for this afternoon."

"The man's crazy! Nobody calls meetings but me."

"For two o'clock this afternoon," he persisted. "At Factory Seven. I overheard it on the phone."

The old lady's eyes were points of fire. "Who was talking?"

"Calvert."

"To whom?"

"Keedrick."

"The dividend-bleater," she reflected softly. "And Calvert is scared out of what little wits God gave him." She stood up, brisk, ready, caparisoned in mind and soul for the challenge thus unexpectedly presented. "Yes; this is important," she granted. "If your information is correct, Dawley, you shall have your letter. We'll talk of Kennion later. They thought they'd get around me on the quiet, did they?" She laughed, and there was an overtone of enjoyment in her laughter; the ha! ha! of the anticipatory war horse, sniffing the battle. "I'll show 'em," said she. Which was probably what the war horse said.

Dawley Cole had a thought. "But if they didn't notify you, it won't be a legal meeting."

"Of course it won't!" She took his thought and bettered it. "It's just a little private gathering of plotters. But I'll show them something."

In her too confident announcement that there would be no meeting, the head of the Ruylands had reckoned without that potent factor of fear. Mahlon, Keedrick, and Selah B., working together for their own diverse ends, had so prevailed upon the alarms of the timorous Calvert

Ruyland-Marsh that he had agreed to summon an unofficial conference of the minor and disaffected stockholders, already disturbed by the threat to their dividends. The affair was to be as secret as possible: so much Calvert had insisted upon. But it was not so secret as to escape the ubiquitous Dawley Cole.

"Yes; I'll be there," said Augusta Ruyland ominously.

One of the most satisfactory silences that she had ever enjoyed or caused followed upon her arrival at the conference. The doorway of the large office in stilled Factory Seven framed her straight figure, her fine smile, her quietly composed face, making a vivid and formidable picture. Selah B. was the first to break the spell which it cast.

"Take my seat, Augusta," he offered courteously, rising.

"Thank you, Selah; I prefer to find my own."

She walked through the group as might a large and preoccupied cat through a flock of apprehensive chickens. At the end of the room a desk had been pushed aside, and with it its chair. She pulled the chair out with an easy motion, swung it around and sat down in it. The effect was to change at once and with painful obviousness the hitherto amorphous conformation of the gathering.

Where Augusta Ruyland sat was the head of the meeting.

With great deliberation she took off her gloves, smoothed them over her knee, and looked about at the stricken faces. Fredericka Ruyland's eyes met hers with an intent regard, neither defiant nor alarmed. Rather it was the look of one whose mind is concentrated upon finding a clew to coming events. The Grandante did not propose to afford any clew.

"You here?" she said with a slight nod. "Very appropriate."

"Mad as a panther inside," mumbled Keedrick in Mahlon's ear.

With her preternaturally acute sense, the subject of this remark had caught the key-word. "It will take a bigger gun than you carry to get my pelt, Keedrick," she gibed good-humoredly.

"Since you are here, Augusta—" began Selah B.

"Without notification," interposed the old lady. "Why was I not notified?"

"Why did you come without being asked?" retorted Mahlon.

"Try to be a gentleman, Mahlon," she admonished loftily, "even though you are engaged in a piece of sneaking skullduggery like this."

Fredericka looked up quickly. "It isn't sneaking," she denied.

The old lady fixed her with an eye of baneful reproof. "I am talking, Fredericka," she reminded her.

"I question your right to talk here, Mrs. Ruyland."

Taken aback for the moment, the Grandante sought easier game. "Who called this precious gathering?" The question was general, but the challenge and the savage glare caught the unfortunate Calvert Ruyland-Marsh square between the eyes. "You did," she charged. "What for? What do you mean by it?"

Calvert chattered like a terrified bird.

"Can't you *talk*?"

"I'll tell you what it was called for," supplied Keedrick sullenly. "So that some of the small stockholders"—his eyes indicated the circle of awed faces—"might see if there isn't some way to save the business before it is wrecked by your—"

"Yes?" she encouraged him with suspicious helpfulness as he paused. "By my—"

"—impolitic course," he finished weakly.

"Willful obstinacy," put in Selah B.

"Bull-headed asininity," said the more free-spoken Mahlon.

"Anything else?" inquired the subject of these back-handed encomiums. "No? Then I'll tell you your real reasons. To knuckle down to the workmen and so save your measly dividends," pronounced the Grandante in tones of sublimated acid. "That's what you're sniggling and conniving for. Well, there'll be no surrender as long as I live, if we have to put every dollar the Company owns into the fight. Cut the coupons off that, will you, Keedrick!"

"This meeting," apologetically began Calvert, summoning his voice from the ventral fastnesses where it had taken refuge, "was arranged—"

"Meeting," she scoffed. "What meeting? What do you mean by 'meeting'?"

"Of course," he hastened to explain, "it was never meant to be a meeting in any official sense."

Here was the waited-for opening. She leaped to it. "Then what are you doing here," she demanded, "in my factory?"

Again the unhappy Calvert fell to wordless chitterings.

"Get out!" commanded the Grandante. She jumped to her feet and made expansive, expulsive gestures. "Get out, one and all of you. *Vamos! Shoo!*" And she laughed. The Grandante was having a *wonderful* time.

The scared little stockholders rose. Fredericka, catching Selah B.'s eye, telegraphed a silent inquiry—Is she within her rights?—and got back a doubtful nod.

"All come to my house," she cried. "We can finish the meeting there."

"At *your* house? Can you?" questioned Augusta Ruyland with such intention that a cold fury invaded and possessed the girl.

"Perhaps not," she admitted. She sat down. "I stay here," she announced.

"I'm with you," said Mahlon.

"And I," added Selah B.

Some of the petty Ruylands resumed their seats, merely from that imitativeness which takes possession of timid souls in time of doubt.

"You think so?" retorted Augusta Ruyland to the challengers. "We'll see what the police have to say to that." She rose and started toward the exit.

"Cousin Mahlon, lock that door." Fredericka's voice was peremptory, and as final as the click of the mechanism which signalized the carrying out of the order.

A lesser Ruyland moaned with amazement. Mused Augusta, in self-reproach: "I should have brought my revolver."

"Speaking of melodrama," commented the girl.

Instantly the Grandante was at the window, her head protruding from the second story. Ruyland-Marsh rushed to her with the speed of dismay and threw himself upon her.

"Let go my leg, you fool!" she admonished him. "I'm not going to jump."

A group of striking workmen in the street took note, not too politely, of the head. "Look who's here!" "It's Grandma!" "Got the thousand ready, Grandma?" There followed the rebuking voices of some of the older men.

Mrs. Ruyland held out a ten-dollar bill, and two of the strikers detached themselves from the group and shambled over. The bill fluttered down to them.

"Call up Tompkins, Fiske & Ruyland's law office and tell Mr. Tompkins to come here at once."

"To-morrow," came the equable answer. "Thanks for the ten, on be'arf of the strike fund."

The Grandante withdrew her face lest there issue from it some of the appropriate but (she felt) all too insufficient words seething in her inside. She whirled upon Fredericka. The meeting had now definitely resolved itself into a personal encounter between those two.

"What excuse have you got for keeping me a prisoner?"

"Since you've chosen to come here, uninvited—"

"On Ruyland property—"

"—you're going to stay long enough to learn why we've come together here. You tell her, Cousin Selah."

"Some of the stockholders," explained Selah in his well-bred, pacific voice, "believe that there is something to be said on the side of the workmen."

"Let the workmen say it themselves, then."

"They have endeavored to say it, but have not met with much encouragement."

"You're running us headforemost into unionization; that's what you're doing," alleged Mahlon fiercely.

"Indeed, Cousin Augusta," put in Calvert eagerly, "you'd hardly believe how radical the sentiment is becoming. Since Borck's last visit—"

"Borck!" broke in the Grandante. "Let him thrust his nose into this town again and see what he finds waiting for him!" Her brows were heavy with menace.

"There's only one reason he hasn't been back. He's ill," contributed Fredericka.

"I hope it's fatal," said the implacable old lady.

"It isn't. And after he comes back I don't know how we're to hold the men."

"Why make a pretense of wanting to? Your sympathies are naturally with the anarchists."

In so far as this was intended to rouse anger in Fredericka, it failed. "If you mean Borck, you're wrong," she returned quietly. "I have the feeling that we ought

to give a better show to our own men than any union would dare to force on us."

"'We!' 'We!'" taunted Augusta Ruyland. "What part of 'we' do you consider yourself, you renegade?"

"Do you know," pursued the girl, "that they're striking in some other places for conditions and terms not as good as ours, and holding up the Ruyland Mills as models of fair dealing? I mean to say, they were until we began to treat our men like slaves and act as if we were czars. When I think of Choral Three—" Her voice choked for a moment.

"Are you here as a representative of Choral Three?" the edged chill of the old lady's voice cut in.

"I'm here because of Choral Three, mostly."

"What standing have you got? Do you own a single share of stock?"

"I have an interest in some shares," replied the girl hesitantly. Her hesitancy was misinterpreted.

"What kind of an interest?" came the prompt challenge.

"An opportunity to buy."

The swift old mind pounced upon the fact of Josephus's holdings. "I know what you've got. Let me tell you, you'll never get those shares. I'll bid you up to the top of the skies before I see a dollar's worth fall into your hands, or anybody else's."

Fredericka's voice was soft, inexplicably so to her opponent, as she answered: "I don't think money will buy that stock."

"The more fool you! Money will buy anything that's in the market." She examined the girl's face long and curiously. "What's your real interest in this, anyway?" she queried.

"I've told you. Choral Three," was the instant response.

Keedrick of the Dividends put in his petulant word. "I don't care anything about your Choral Three, but I want this labor trouble fixed up before it's too late."

"You won't get it fixed but in one way," was the Grandante's uncompromising reply.

"Choral Three can wait," offered Ruyland-Marsh timidly. "I think we should approach the matter of the discharged men first."

"These club movements come and go," said Selah B. "Why overestimate the importance of this one and so lose sight of the main issue?"

"It is the main issue for me," asserted Fredericka.

"For me, too," supported Mahlon.

She gave him a grateful glance. Both were loyally thinking of the dead Norval. Now Mahlon gave voice to his thought. "It was Norval's idea. If he were here—"

"This is an issue for the living, not the dead," broke in the old lady hardily. She turned the clear regard of her eyes upon Fredericka again. "It was Choral Three's own lookout that they took the leasehold. The terms were there for them to read."

"They trusted Norval for that—and me," rejoined the girl bitterly.

"Which seems to have been a mistake." The old lady liked that; it seemed to leave little to be said in the way of retort.

"It may be legal, what you are doing," rejoined the girl, ignoring the taunt; "but there isn't any justice in it."

The old lady shrugged indifferent shoulders. "I'm not interested in justice; I'm interested in the Ruyland Company's mills."

"I thought we came here to talk over the strike," complained Keedrick.

"Talk yourselves blind. Your kind of talk gets nowhere. And it fails to interest me. How long have I got to stay here and listen to it?"

Mahlon took the key from his pocket and unlocked the door. On the threshold the released prisoner paused. "We understand each other, I think. When you want to get together again and make your little plots and whimper about dividends, do your plotting and whimpering somewhere else than on Company property. A fine lot of Ruylands, the lot of you!"

"Not me," denied Fredericka, upon whom the other's contemptuous and belittling grimace was directed.

"Like it or lump it, you're a Ruyland," was the homely and vigorous rejoinder. "It's an ill bird that fouls its own nest, Fredericka Ruyland. I'll leave you this to mull over." She shook a slender, manicured forefinger at the girl. "Cast your lot in with your precious Choral Three, if you like; but understand this. It's a fight to a finish. And," she added with profound conviction, "there's never but one finish to a Ruyland fight."

The girl's laughter rang its challenge through the room, startling in its spontaneous gayety. "I'll fight," she said.

Out in the street, Augusta Ruyland found herself confronted by an old giant of a factory hand, a machine-tender in Factory Five. His coat was ripped, and his under lip a bloody puff. He was holding out her ten-dollar bill.

"Here's your money, Mrs. Ruyland," he mumbled. "Them lads never meant to take it."

She waved him away. "Keep it, Tim," she said absently.

Her mind was on deeper portents. "I'll fight," Fredericka had announced in her jubilant voice. Fight, would she? Well, the Grandante had never shrunk from a fight; and yet she had never before felt the curious mis-

giving now besetting her. It was not the defiant words that clung in the busy, old mind; it was the daring of that joyous and confident laughter.

War had been openly declared for the first time against Augusta Ruyland, head of the clan and Chairman of the Board of the Ruyland Paper Company—and declared with a laugh.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

EXPERIENCE had taught Mr. Samuel Coleson to be least trustful of the Grandante when she seemed most casual. Now she had just advanced a pawn one square when two seemed the obvious move. Mr. Coleson set aside the glass of superior whisky at his elbow the better to concentrate upon the problem presented. He was aware of not being up to his usual form this evening, for he had come to The Rock with a divided mind, and his expectations constantly seduced his attention. What did that apparently ill-considered and wasteful play mean?

"Oh, hell!" said Mr. Coleson in a soft and disillusioned whisper. He had just perceived the peril to which the pawn's slow progress had exposed his too enterprising rook, but failed to discover any profitable egress from the entanglement. Augusta Ruyland smiled cheerily. She liked to win. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that she hated to lose. After half a dozen more moves, swift and assured on her part, slow and painfully debated upon his, he had saved his rook, but only at the cost of a shattered attack and a defense seriously compromised.

The doorbell jangled. Mr. Coleson looked up. "It's your play, Sam," his hostess testily reminded him, for the slow pace was annoying her.

"That'll be him," he remarked.

"Who?"

"Ben."

The beginning of a frown wrinkled the broad space

between the Grandante's eyes. "Ben Ainsworth? What fetches him here? What are you two up to?"

Ainsworth entered the little side room where the mistress of The Rock carried on her minor warfare of the chessboard. "Evenin', boss," he greeted in his rich voice.

"Don't try to come over me with your soft-soap, Ben Ainsworth. I'm not your boss."

The newcomer ruffled his mustache with the stump of a finger, the rest of which had fed a snappish Ruyland machine years before. "Seems queer, don't it?" he reflected.

"It's your own doings."

"Well, now, about that," began Coleson, but was silenced by the Grandante's hand pointing at him.

"You've come here to talk about the strike and the chess was only a blind," she accused. "Not with me. Don't think it!" She rose just a bit too abruptly. Coleson's grab for the stand was not quite quick enough. It tilted over and all the Grandante's careful strategy clattered in ruin to the floor.

"You had me licked anyway," said the guileful Coleson. "I couldn't 'a' saved the knight."

She had the grace to grin. "Now I *know* you're up to some devilment, you and Ben. It's no use, boys. Have a drink before you go, Ben?"

But the two veterans had not dealt with Augusta Ruyland for a quarter of a century without learning tactics. They had planned this visit with care.

"We came to say good-by," announced Ainsworth.

The old lady blinked. "Where are you going?"

"We got another job." This from Coleson.

"Out of Habersham?"

"Yes. The Anson Mills are expanding. They're takin' us both on."

That the strategy was working was evident from the

dismay which the object of it could not quite keep out of her face. It was no part of her plan that these two old-timers should take the decisive step of leaving Habershams. She had intended to keep them on the anxious seat long enough to punish them properly and vindicate her authority and dignity as head of the Ruyland Mills; then to take them back with a fine flourish of generosity. They knew this (as, indeed they were expected to know it) from the fact that their places had been supplied for the short working time before the strike was called by obviously temporary makeshifts. The strike—which she had persisted in believing to be a day-to-day affair, doomed to extinction to-morrow or, at most, next week—had prolonged the situation as to Ben and Sam. But those two knew what their ex-boss refused to realize—that unless a settlement was reached before Borck returned with his lieutenants, nothing could hold the strikers back from unionizing. There would follow that grim and long-drawn-out struggle of an industrial community in a state of siege by and against itself. The two faithful employees were of no mind for that. Borck was all right in principle, very likely. They were too intelligent not to appreciate the advantages of unionism, though they considered it something of a newfangled experiment. But they didn't want the unions in Habershams; not while they lived and might yet work in the mills. They were too old to take orders from a union. They were too old, in fact, to take orders from anybody but Augusta Ruyland.

"What wages?" she asked with an effort, coming up out of the depths of her musings.

"'Bout the same as here," was the offhand reply.

She made a still greater effort. "I don't want you boys to go," she muttered.

"That'll be all right," Coleson assured her, jumping

at the opening for which he had hoped. "We got our little plan." As if moved by the same mechanism he and his companion hunched their chairs up closer. They bent forward. The old lady bent forward. The three old heads were close together. A trio of conspirators darkly plotting over their liquor.

Coleson assumed a hard and argumentative air. "Who were the trouble-makers in this thing, to begin with? Ben and me, wasn't we?"

The hard tone encountered something harder in the Grandante's scornful "Stuff and nonsense!"

"Well, we got the name of it anyway," Ainsworth came to his friend's support. "All right. We quit. Morse and Best have gone already. Good riddance to bad rubbish. That slut, Mary Ray, got a singin' job on the stage, so *she* says. Markey's on the trail of somethin' in Boston. There's half the original ring-leaders, pretty near, out of the way; and now if we go—do you get it?" In his earnestness he had laid two impressive fingers upon the Grandante's knee. She looked at them fixedly, as if in that earnest gesture inhered the clew to what the men were getting at, and they were hurriedly withdrawn.

"No; I don't get it," she murmured.

"Why, we're fired, just as you said we'd be fired; and we're staying fired like you said. You've made good on what you said; that we was out and would stay out. Well, we're takin' our medicine, and we're sayin' so all around the place. Havin' got rid of us you can afford to take back the rest of the people that went to Borck's meetin'. Shucks! What do they amount to, anyway? That knocks the props out from under the strike, don't it? Don't you believe but what they'll be glad enough to grab at a good excuse to get their jobs back. Understand now?"

Yes; the Grandante understood, all but one point: why were these two whom she had treated to such rigid punishment—justly merited, it is true, but how expect erring humanity to accept justice visited, however justly, upon itself—aiding her now? She put the question, in no spirit of suspicion, but rather of dawning gratitude.

Ainsworth cleared his throat. Coleson tucked his hand into his coat front.

"Chickens," began Ainsworth, "come home to roost."

"Cast your bread upon the waters," said Coleson piously.

"What do you two fools think you're doing?" demanded the astonished and indignant Grandante, with eyes which, nevertheless, twinkled. "Speaking a piece at me? Talk straight or shut up."

They looked at each other ruefully. "Maggie chased me here," confessed Coleson. "She says young Sammy'd never have pulled through that grip but for your turnin' one of your own folks into the public hospital ward so the kid could have his room."

Ainsworth took up the tale of benefits unforgot. "Maybe you remember a scrape," he said shamefacedly, "when I was a fresh kid, huntin' trouble around town, and found more'n I looked for. If it hadn't been—"

"Oh, that blackmailing wench!" recalled the old lady. "It was no trick to get rid of her."

He shook his head. "Not for you, maybe. But it saved me runnin' away to sea. So—" said Ben Ainsworth.

"That's why—" said Sam Coleson. They were now considerably terrified. If the boss started to thank them, what *would* they do! They might have known better.

"That's all very well, you boys," said she briskly. Their faces cleared. Trust the old girl to handle a

touchy situation. "But how about Choral Three? That's just as much responsible for the strike as your foolishness." Their faces clouded again with concern, for here was the second and more difficult point of strategy.

"We hear you're buyin' the leasehold," said Coleson.

She scowled. "Where did you hear that?"

"Oh, it's around town. There's lots of talk goin'; mostly lies, I reckon."

"You're right about the leasehold, though," she admitted, tacitly trusting them. "It hasn't gone through yet."

"What's your idea, if you don't mind?"

"I want that property where a few spineless stockholders have nothing further to say about it," she explained viciously.

"If you take it over, it ain't a Company leasehold any more," reflected Coleson.

"All the terms remain in force just the same, though," she pointed out with satisfaction. "I retain the same control the Company had."

"Sure! But we was thinkin', Ben and me, there's never been any holes punched in the Company agreements, has there?"

"No. And there never will be while I'm alive."

"That's the point. As long as it's the Company property and Choral Three is breakin' the Company rules, nothin' doin'. Aye? But when you take it over and it ain't Company property any more, whatever you do, it don't start nothin'. Do you get me? It don't establish any what-you-callem."

"Precedent," suggested the Grandante.

"Thank you, boss." Coleson warmed to his subject. "Here we are, then. You get that leasehold and then you turn right 'round and give it to Choral Three, like you've always given things to organizations in Haber-

sham, you and your folks. Throw it at their heads. You say to 'em: 'Here's your old club house, free of charge. I'm givin' it to you because I don't need it in my business. That's how much I'm afraid of it and you,' you say. 'Take it and stick—' "

"It in your pipe and smoke it," hastily interjected the tactful Ainsworth, for Sam Coleson, in the flush of oratorical fervor, was prone to a too generous breadth of expression.

Low laughter bubbled from the Grandante's throat. "Oh, you boys!" she cried. "You pair of innocents! I'll do it, just so as not to disappoint you. You shall have your toy! And besides," she added, her shrewd old mind busily scenting all around the project like a bird-dog scouting a well-concealed covey, "it's the cheapest and quickest way of ending the strike."

Two great sighs of relief went up. "That's all settled, then," said one of the men.

Nothing further was said about it. There was no need. They understood each other, that trio. A quarrel in the family, as it were, best composed with fewest words. She filled up three glasses. They sat there, sipping and gossiping, the two workmen and the grand dame, three friends, comfortable and content.

Startlingly loud through the quiet house, the old-fashioned doorbell tingled. Ten-forty by Ben Ainsworth's hastily consulted watch. "Shall I go?" he asked, and went at the Grandante's nod. They heard him at the door, saying: "Why, hello, Joe. What you doin' up so late?" and a thick mumble of reply. Then, from Ben, in kindly warning: "Better sleep over it, Joe, and come back in the morning." Josephus Ruyland had served his working apprenticeship under Ainsworth and therefore was and always would be "Joe" to him. Such was the factory tradition.

Josephus entered. He looked flushed and sulky, and his greeting to his relative was such that she became at once, and without a word spoken, her haughtiest and most arrogant self. The two workmen signaled a query; should they go or stand by? Receiving a smiling dismissal, they departed, confident in their friend's ability to take care of herself and the situation.

No sooner had the door closed than she said: "You've been drinking again."

"What if I have! I can talk business, can't I?"

"Business, indeed! What business have you got with me?"

"I want that thousand dollars reward."

The strong tide of color rushed up to her temples. A Ruyland of the blood turned informer. "You dirty sneak!" she pronounced, distilling her contempt, drop by slow drop.

"I threw the rock," he said surlily.

Her face cleared. "I beg your pardon, Josephus," said she. "That's quite a different matter. You're only a fool; not a blackguard. Do you realize that I can put you in jail for this?"

"Yes. But I don't believe you'll do it. Too stuck on your damn family pride."

"The same can hardly be said of you," she gibed. "And what will you do with the thousand dollars? Drink it up?"

"Probably. What's that to you? Do I get the money?"

"Did you ever know me to go back on my word?" she countered.

Seating herself at the desk, she wrote out a receipt which was at the same time a confession, and filled in a check. "Sign that," she directed.

When he rose, after obeying, she was standing before

him holding the check in her left hand. "You sold your stock to Fredericka Ruyland," she shot at him.

"Didn't," he grunted, taken by surprise. "I sold it to Enderby, if you want to know."

"Take your money."

As he reached for the proffered check, her right hand caught him, flat-palmed, flush across the cheek with such hearty good will that a red welt rose.

"Ow!" he cried, like a punished schoolboy.

"Get out!" ordered the Grandante.

Josephus got out. The old lady worked her hand back and forth. Little sprangling pains were running through it deliciously. She laughed aloud. She was pleased with life again, was the Grandante. She thrilled like a youth in love to the sense of power and pride and of the doing of fine and potent deeds.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

ON the third Thursday of a stormy April, Augusta Ruyland called at the house of her grandnephew, Ken-nion, and asked for his wife. The maid was suspiciously doubtful as to her mistress's whereabouts, a condition of mind not shared by the caller.

"You may as well come down, Fredericka," she projected her voice up the stairway. "I saw you sitting at your window as I drove up. No use sulking with me, my dear."

Well, that was true enough! The Grandante was capable of camping at the foot of the stairs in the lease-holded house, or even of mounting above and ferreting out the quarry. Fredericka came down. She had set her face determinedly in a mold of calm; she even permitted herself a slight smile of welcome, quite successfully formal.

"That's right," approved her visitor. "There's no call for us to scratch each other's eyes out simply because I feel it my duty to protect the business against your wild ideas. On calm thought you'll agree with me, I'm sure." The Grandante was always sure that everybody would agree with her on calm thought—or ought to.

"I don't like to be called a sneak and a renegade," stated Fredericka.

"Oh, that's only in the heat of argument. I'm an excitable old person." She made this concession in a tone of childlike faith that it would be more than acceptable.

"You were as cool and deliberate as any one I ever saw in my life," contradicted the girl.

The Grandante was delighted. "Did you really think so? That proves how well under control I have myself. Ah, Fredericka, you don't realize the weight of responsibility I struggle under. If you did, you'd be more sympathetic." She was in one of those moods, common to most dogmatic and dominant characters, wherein, being prepared graciously to concede something, they expect recognition and flattery in return.

Fredericka felt no inclination toward soft words. "You don't want sympathy. You want submission."

"I expect it," was the prompt return, "where Company interests are concerned."

"Have you come to see me about Company affairs?"

"Certainly not! Though, as you have brought it up, I may as well tell you that I've issued an order dissolving Choral Three."

Fredericka laughed in mingled exasperation and amusement. "Why don't you dissolve the Y.M.C.A.? You have just as much authority over it. I wonder that you haven't sworn out an injunction, or whatever it is the lawyers get, forbidding us to meet."

"I wanted to, but my lawyers told me that the judge wouldn't issue it. I don't know what our courts are coming to!" she finished gloomily.

"You probably know that Choral Three is bringing suit against the Company," said the girl offhandedly.

The old head jerked upward with a queerly paralytic motion. "I never heard of such outrageous insolence," cried she. "A pack of ignorant workmen—"

"We're not all workmen in Choral Three," the other reminded her.

"No. You're in this law business, I'll be bound."

"I started it. I told you I'd fight if you forced me to it. Did you actually suppose that we'd sit still and

let you take our club house that we built, ourselves, away from us?"

"Have you read the terms of the leasehold?"

"Our lawyers have. They don't accept your interpretation."

"Those leases have stood for over a hundred years. I don't think your Choral Three is likely to sing them down."

"We might compromise," suggested Fredericka, and noted with lively satisfaction the dark suffusion of blood which the hated word brought to the other's face, "by buying the leasehold from the Company."

"Not if you offered a million dollars. Ruyland leaseholds don't pass out of the family." She checked herself sharply and fell into thought. Some plan, Fredericka could see, was formulating in that resourceful brain. "I didn't come here to quarrel over our troubled affairs, my dear," she resumed briskly. "After all, I try always to remember that you are Kennion's wife, and, at bottom, one of us."

"Whether I'm Kennion's wife or not, I'm not one of you."

"That's very ungracious of you, Fredericka," reproved the old lady with an effort at melancholy for which the girl heartily hated her. "*Are* you Kennion's wife, or are you not?"

The question was fairly shot at the target, but the wary Fredericka was not to be startled into any betrayal. "Would you like to see my certificate?" she asked sweetly.

"You know perfectly well what I mean. The locked door."

"So you know that. You seem to know everything. Has Kennion run to you, whining?" queried the young

wife, and was instantly ashamed of that open disloyalty. "I don't believe he has," she made hasty amendment. "You've been snooping."

Still maintaining her tone of gentle dignity, Augusta Ruyland said: "I refuse to let you anger me. Kennion has said nothing. My discovery was made quite accidentally. I may say that, regrettable though I consider your course, I can no longer blame you. (This with a fine effect of magnanimity.) No woman could," she appended.

Not understanding in the least, Fredericka waited.

"I like pride in a woman," pronounced the Grandante.

Fredericka reflected. "She can approve pride when it doesn't run counter to her own. Wonder what I've been being proud about." But still failing to discern the trend of these observations, she held her tongue.

"I suppose," continued the Grandante, "you knew about Kennion all the time."

Fredericka told a black and shameless lie in immovable silence; by the stolid impenetrability of her expression she let the old lady believe that she knew whatever there was to know.

"And were too proud to show your hurt, poor child."

"If she calls me 'poor child' again, I shall throw something at her head," thought Fredericka. And, indeed, the Grandante in the mood of condescending pity was pretty insufferable.

"It was loyal and fine of you to have held your tongue. But you might properly have come to me as the head of the family."

At this the girl broke out. "*Will* you tell me what you are talking about?"

"Kennion and that woman," answered the other, taken aback.

"What woman?"

"The Selover hussy."

"Dorrie Selover?" Fredericka gave a laugh of scorn.

"She isn't a woman; she's a child."

"She's a woman, a handsome woman; and a dangerous and scheming one. She's inveigled poor Kennion—"

"Oh, Mrs. Ruyland; don't come to me with any tales about Kennion and Dorrie Selover! She's been away at school for over a year."

"They've been meeting in New York," returned the old lady impressively. "They've been seen together at restaurants—and other places." The final phrase was pure imagination on the speaker's part, but she thought it probable and so tacked it on for effect. It missed.

"Suppose they have," returned Kennion's wife disdainfully. "Who's been tattling?" With a flash of intuition she added: "Have you taken Dawley Cole back into your employment?"

"I have not and I never will. But you can rely on my information."

Fredericka summoned a smile. "There's no reason why Kennion shouldn't see Dorrie and plenty of reasons why he should, since he's educating her."

"Educating her! After she refused to go to the school I selected?"

Here was proof, Fredericka reflected, that Kennion had welshed on telling his great-aunt of their plans for Dorothea. How could a man be so pusillanimous, so cowed! "Hasn't he said anything to you about it?" she heard herself asking.

"No. He wouldn't dare."

"Evidently not. I told you that what you demanded was submission. You get full measure from some of the family!"

"Never mind me. Your husband's unfaithfulness—" Fredericka's short laugh clipped the sentence.

"Oh, unfaithfulness! I shouldn't worry over that if I were you."

"No; you wouldn't," retorted Augusta Ruyland in a fury. "You're too cold-blooded to care."

The young wife took time to think that over. Presently she said in a musing tone: "No; I'd care. I'd care a lot. I'd be awfully sorry for Kennion."

The Grandante gave a gasp. "You talk like a zany."

"I'm trying to be specially sane about this. If he were unfaithful to me in your sense it would be because he's stopped loving me. And it hurts to stop loving a person. I know. Not that I believe there's anything in your suspicions."

"I know there is," insisted the old lady, characteristically translating a suspicion into certainty. "Leave him to me, though. I'll bring him back to you on his knees."

"Do you think I'd want him that way?" flashed the girl. She added more coolly: "What reason have you for supposing that I want him back at all?"

"Ah!" cried the other triumphantly. "You're saying that because you *are* hurt."

"Beyond forgiveness, I think." The words sounded a still deliberation.

Alarmed, the old lady changed her tactics. "You mustn't say that," she protested. "If we can get this Selover creature out of the way—"

"Can't I make you understand that it's no question of her?" broke in the other wearily. "His unfaithfulness is so much worse—"

"Worse? What can you mean by that? I'm an old woman, and an old-fashioned woman I dare say, but to my mind betrayal between husband and wife is the unforgivable offense."

"I'm afraid I believe that too," said the girl, with heavy eyes.

"Well? Then—"

"There's more than one kind of betrayal."

"Only one that is unpardonable."

Fire flashed into the young, thought-burdened face. "Can't you see that when he let me walk out of Norval's funeral alone, under your attack, that was more of a betrayal than the kind you mean could possibly be?"

Groping and mazed, the Grandante chattered out something about "modern immoral ideas."

"You think there's only one kind of morals, just as you think of only one kind of infidelity. Isn't treachery immoral? Perhaps it isn't, though. Perhaps it's only a symptom of a disease, and the disease is cowardice."

"Are you talking to yourself or me?"

"I beg your pardon." The girl's accents changed to those of politeness which was also indifference. "*I was* talking to myself. I'll try to explain. If Kennion went with another woman, I could understand that it might be a sudden temptation beyond his control [the Grandante snorted her indignant protest], and I can see how I could forgive him, though it wouldn't be easy." Her voice lowered and grew tense in her throat. "But when he deliberately chose to sit still and hear you accuse me of causing the death of the man you killed, yourself—"

"*I!*" The old lady rose, quivering in every muscle. "*I killed Norval Ruyland?*"

"As surely as if you'd run a knife into his heart," went on the relentless voice. "As surely as you blight everything you touch; as you've blighted our marriage, Kennion's and mine."

The hard old chin sunk. "How can you say that?" she protested in an appalled mutter.

"Isn't it true? Haven't you done the same with Josephus? Wouldn't you have done it with Elberta if she hadn't had the courage to break away from you and marry the man she loved?"

The old lady, looking pitifully older, sat down again. "Is Elberta married?"

"Last week. I had a letter from them. There's one life you haven't managed to spoil."

In spite of herself, Fredericka admired the self-forgetfulness with which the other ignored the attack made upon her, and reverted to Kennion's happiness. "Is your marriage ruined?" she asked wistfully. "Haven't you any feeling left for Kennion?"

Fredericka hesitated. "There's always something left," she said slowly, "toward a man that you've lived with, even if it's only hate."

"You don't hate Kennion," pleaded the loyal advocate.

"No; I don't hate him."

"Isn't there a chance, then?"

"How can I tell?" cried the girl. "If he were different— But if he were different he wouldn't be Kennion."

Augusta Ruyland put forth a mighty effort. "Your mother suggested something. Your mother is a very wise woman, Fredericka. Wise and kind." Suddenly Fredericka felt her eyes smart. To hear the despotic and self-sufficient head of the Ruylands imply the need of kindness toward herself had in it something of the pathetic, some foretaste of surrender. "If I didn't"—she gulped and went on—"interfere, if I kept away from you both—" She stopped with leveled eyes of hope.

"Oh, Mrs. Ruyland!" Fredericka's smile was rueful. "You couldn't keep your hands off. It isn't in you."

"But if I did, isn't there any chance? Be fair to Kennion."

The young wife stifled an unrecognized protest that rose and stirred in the depths of her heart. "There's always a chance," she admitted.

"I'll tell Kennion," cried the other eagerly.

"There you go!" Fredericka threw out hands of comic despair. "If it's to be done, you have to be the one to do it, don't you!"

"I won't," the Grandante humbled herself to say, and took her leave.

Before she reached home, still brimming with good intentions, still honestly believing in her own purpose to step aside and leave the young couple to readjust themselves, she had filled in her plan to smash Choral Three, with Kennion as a necessary, though minor factor, in the destruction. So impotent was she in the grip of her own lust for power!

Locating Dawley Cole was a matter of some difficulty for Fredericka. The little man's employment seemed to be of a casual and tenuous nature. Eventually she came upon him furtively emerging from a cheap lunch counter on a side street, and took him into her car.

"I want to tell you, Dawley Cole," said she, "before you spread any other stories about my husband, that you're miles off the track. About Dorrie Selover, I mean."

"But I haven't spread any stories," he protested.

"You told Mrs. Ruyland. That's spreading enough."

He hung a dispirited head. "She got it out of me. Anyway, I thought it was something you ought to know."

"Back at the old spying game, Dawley," she said sadly. "And it didn't even get you your old job, did it?"

"No."

"What did it get you? Anything?"

"She—she sent me a check for twenty-five dollars."

"And you took it?"

"A man's got to live somehow. I was pretty far down, just then," he pleaded.

Pity for the dejected poor relation submerged her contempt. After all, it was his chivalrous instinct toward her when she most needed aid that had caused his downfall. "I wish I could do something for you," she mused.

He cocked a hopeful head. "You might let me know of any little items, social happenings and things like that, for the paper."

"Such as Elberta's marriage to Ransome Case?"

He made eager notes. "Tell me all about it. This is sensational," he quite crowed. "The first good item I've had to-day."

Having conscientiously set down what meager details she could furnish, he said: "Tit for tat, Mrs. Kennion. I've got some information for you. About Choral Three. Confidential, of course."

"What is it?" she smiled.

"Cousin Augusta Ruyland is going to buy the leasehold of the club-house property from the Company."

So uncontrollable was the twitch which her nerves communicated to her muscles that the car barely swerved away from the curb in time. "You mean buy it for herself?"

"Yes."

"I see. She's going to make sure that there'll be no opposition in the Company to her fight. But, Dawley, can she do that?"

"If the directors will sell, and she offers a fair price, I don't see why not."

"Haven't the stockholders got any rights in the matter?"

"Oh, well, you know the way they do things. Stockholders or directors, what difference does it make? They all do what the Grandante tells 'em."

"Are you sure your information is correct? Where did you get it?"

"We newspapermen have our ways of getting information," replied Dawley Cole importantly.

Fredericka hurried home to write a letter. Norval's personal counsel in New York, Mr. Mason Russell of Russell, Russell & King, had, after some hemming and hawing toward the end of their former conversation, informed her that by special request of the late Mr. Ruyland (which, it was evident, had failed to merit his legal approbation) she was to let him, Mr. Russell, know if any immediate and destructive danger—"those were his precise words, Mrs. Ruyland; 'any immediate and destructive danger'"—threatened the Choral Three property, the communication to be made to him privately.

A wire in the morning informed her that her letter was being forwarded to Mr. Russell, who was out of town. Meantime she heard from Mahlon that the Chairwoman of the Board had called a meeting for Saturday, only two days away.

Fredericka resolved to go to that meeting and demand a hearing as a stockholder. For this she must have Robert Enderby's stock or his proxy. Enderby, she learned, was not in Habersham; was not expected back until the end of the week. After a good deal of thought, she wired him also.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

SARDONIC chance which so potently rules and confounds the lives poetically licensed as being under control of us fate-masters and soul-captains, forgives us our sins, condones our grossest errors, then turns and rends us for our best-intentioned and most righteous actions. So it was that Augusta Ruyland offered a benign, gracious and self-glorifying deed as sacrifice, and was rewarded with the bitterness of her first defeat.

The more the Grandante thought of the Coleson-Ainsworth plan, the better she liked it. It enticed her sense of generosity, her instinct for the dramatic. She purposed to dramatize it to the full. But before bestowing her gift, her victory over the rebels must be emphasized and her authority finally vindicated beyond cavil.

Among her other qualities of generalship, the head of the clan boasted the capacity for getting along with little or no sleep. Until almost dawn, after her call upon Fredericka, she sat at her desk in the Conspiratory, figuring and reckoning, went to bed for two hours, and by eight was at breakfast with John, the heaviest stockholder next to herself and her staunch, not to say slavish, ally. John, pallid as a worm and of much the same physical texture, gave a displeasing report of the situation. Mahlon, the crafty and unscrupulous, had been, he said, inciting fear among the small stockholders by cleverly dangling the boggy of unionism. They would attend the meeting in a body, ready, most of them, to follow his lead with Selah B. and the panicky Calvert

Ruyland-Marsh, in insisting upon peace overtures. Sister Augusta's plan of taking over the club-house property (he had not been let into the secret of the full plan) would, in his opinion, be regarded as an act of further war; it would be strongly opposed. The Grandante's lower lip protruded.

"You don't think they'll go so far as to bring it to a vote by shares," said she incredulously.

With all due respect to his kinswoman's feelings, John did so think. The accepted method was for any action determined upon in family council or by the Grandante, to be put in the form of a motion, unanimously passed, and so recorded. Adjournment.

"They'll get their vote then," she snapped. "We've got strength enough to sweep 'em off the face of the earth." She mentioned the total represented by the inner council.

"Enough to win certainly," conceded the more cautious John. "But it may not be very impressive without Norval's stock to vote."

"I don't understand the delay in probating his will. We'll have to count that lot out. Josephus has sold his twenty shares to a dummy representing young Enderby. I have a notion they'll turn up in Kennion's wife's hands."

John grunted unpleasantly. "And Kennion?"

"Perfectly safe. Leave him to me," was the self-confident reply.

Upon John's departure she summoned her grand-nephew to The Rock and, in the pride of her dominance, laid the whole plan before him: the purchase, the gift, the knocking out of the underpinning of the strike, and the consequent confounding both of the rebels and of the weak-kneed among the Ruylands. Something theatrical within Kennion responded to it; he was delighted and readily acceded to her imposition of absolute secrecy.

When would she declare the gift? Not for two or three days probably; she wanted to give the recalcitrants time to savor their defeat to the full. In return he gave her a little surprise: he had unexpectedly secured control of some stock which he could conscientiously vote in favor of her project. So much to be added to the completeness of her triumph; she would teach Mahlon and his crew a salutary lesson, exulted the Grandante. It did not occur to her one-ideaed mind that in thus conspiring with Kennion she was breaking her agreement of non-interference, proposed to Fredericka. This was business, and business was of the Ruylands, by the Ruylands, and for the Ruylands without outside intervention.

Fredericka broached the subject of the attack on Choral Three at luncheon, to which Kennion had returned from a workless laboratory.

"Where is the Saturday meeting to be held, Kennion?"

"At Factory Three. The big room at The Rock is being decorated."

"I think I'll go."

"Oh, I don't believe I would, Freddy."

"I've got an interest in that meeting through Choral Three," she pointed out.

"That would hardly get you into a stockholders' meeting."

"Your Aunt Augusta would keep me out, you mean."

"Well, there's no use in making any unpleasantness," he answered characteristically.

"No, never make any unpleasantness. Always let it come of itself while you sit by and watch." Fredericka was being neither amiable nor admirable, as she was well aware, but she did not care. "I suppose she could hardly bar me out if I had a proxy."

"Enderby's proxy? By the way, I've got that myself in blank."

"Where did you get it?" Challenge was in her eyes, and suspicion.

"He left it for me when he left town, as he might not get back until this noon."

"To be turned over to me," she inferred.

"He didn't say so."

"He wouldn't. He wouldn't think it necessary."

"You have a high regard for that earnest young man, haven't you?" he commented teasingly but with an undertone of seriousness.

"He isn't an earnest young man," she rejoined sulkily. "I've got confidence in him, if that's what you mean."

"Try having confidence in me for once," he suggested.

She stifled the temptation to the logical retort "Why should I?" and asked, "What do you want me to do?"

"Save us both possible embarrassment by not trying to get into the meeting."

"While the Grandante makes hash of Choral Three."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Of course, if you want to be disagreeable!"

A sharp pity for him, for herself, for their severing lives pierced her. "Oh, Kennion, I don't mean to be rotten about it. But how can I go back on my word to Norval?"

"You won't be going back on Norval," he cried eagerly. "Nothing is going to happen to Choral Three. I can't tell you the whole thing; I'm bound in secrecy for the present. But everything will be perfectly all right. Just as right as you could possibly want it."

"And you won't vote that stock against the interests of Choral Three?"

"Absolutely not. I give you my word." He smiled at her, thinking of Augusta Ruyland's grand prospective splurge of carefully stage-set surprise. A vote to sell the property to her would, in the final issue, be most

effectually for and not against Choral Three. After the meeting and while his great-aunt was warm-spirited with victory, he would obtain her release to tell Fredericka the whole benevolent plot.

The young wife nodded, convinced by that smile. "All right, Kennion. I'll leave it to you."

The morning's mail, on the Saturday of the meeting, brought a note from Mahlon to Fredericka asking her to stay at home so that he might keep touch with her by phone. Something was brewing, he added; he didn't know just what it was, but the old devil was in it. The girl would have called up and assured him that everything was all right but for the arrival of another morning communication, so much more important that it drove everything else from her mind temporarily. It was from the law office of Russell, Russell & King of New York, and had been brought personally by one of the younger associates of the firm. Plunged into a whirl of responsibility, Fredericka was bending every effort to mastering the details thus suddenly presented when she was called to the phone. Mahlon's usually slow speech, quickened to excitement, said:

"Can you come here at once?"

"What's happening?"

"Augusta is forcing through a vote to give herself the club-house property."

"Yes, I know. But—"

"You know! Do you realize what it means to Choral Three? Our finish. We need every vote, and even then we're probably beaten. Where's that proxy you spoke of?"

"Kennion has it."

"That settles it."

"Why, no, Mahlon. Kennion's all right. He'll vote against it."

"Will he! Then he'll have to change mighty quick. He's just made an argument in favor of the sale."

A well-conducted young matron had apologized to the legal representative for leaving him to go to the phone. A human whirlwind came rushing back upon him, bundled him into hat and coat, and hustled him to a runabout waiting at the curb.

Why they were not arrested half a dozen times in the ensuing trip, he could not understand, not knowing of the privileges and exemptions incident to being a Ruyland in Habersham. He answered a score of shrewd, swift questions, and, as the car bumped the curb in front of Factory Three, was bidden to make all speed back downtown by himself.

Such was Fredericka's inner furor that she had seemed to be crawling to her goal. Through the window she could see the gathering dominated by the spare figure of Augusta Ruyland. Mahlon was not in the hallway as she had expected. A doorman said to her: "They're takin' a vote."

She pushed by him and entered the room. They were not taking a vote. The vote was over. By the calm satisfaction of the Chairwoman's face the intruder knew the result. Her husband rose before her.

"Fredericka," he began, in wavering excitement.

She ignored him. "I demand the right to vote," said she, addressing the chair.

"What right, Fredericka?" Augusta Ruyland's smile was serene; her attitude one of courteous attention.

"Too late. The polls are closed," interposed Ruyland Tompkins, head counsel for the Company. Something in the newcomer's bearing had aroused misgivings in his trained legal soul.

"Keep quiet, Ruyland. I should like to know what

Mrs. Kennion Ruyland proposes to vote," said the Chairwoman composedly.

"One hundred and ten shares of Ruyland Paper Company stock," returned Fredericka with savage precision.

The number struck the meeting into a dumb stricture of amazement. Every one there knew that this was Norval Ruyland's exact holding. Tompkins recovered his legal balance.

"Until the will is probated any shares devised by the late—"

"The shares are not a bequest. They were a deed—a transfer, I mean."

The Grandante's face was quite expressionless as she leaned forward. "Let me see the deed?"

Fredericka handed the papers to her.

"Great God!" whispered Peter W., 3d, to John in a throaty wheeze audible in every corner of the room. "That gives a majority against us."

The Company counsel was now bending over the Company head, whispering in her ear.

"The vote stands," she pronounced. "Anything further? If not, a motion to adjourn is in order."

From between the white teeth that showed thinly, back of Fredericka's lips, the words were clipped out. "I've applied for an injunction against the transfer."

Tompkins looked at his watch. "It can't issue to-day."

His assurance was overborne by the Grandante's snarling challenge as she took a step toward the arch-rebel. "You've done that?"

"Yes. And if you make one move against Choral Three I'll vote all my stock against you on every question until I've brought you to terms."

The assembled Ruylands sat paralyzed. *Lèse-majesté* had reared its horrid head in the clan.

"Get your injunction and welcome. If there are enough

workmen in Habersham to do it, there won't be any club house on *my* property this time to-morrow."

Kennion Ruyland leaped to his feet. "Aunt Augusta!" His hands went up like those of a man pleading mercy. "You can't—"

"I'll keep my word. I'll make a free gift of the property. But there won't be one stone standing on another when the deed passes."

The young man's hands dropped. He began to move, slowly and lifelessly toward the door. Fredericka confronted him.

"Where are you going?"

He winced away from the voice. "I've got to see Enderby," he muttered distractedly. "I've got to explain—"

"Isn't explanation rather superfluous?"

He did not seem to comprehend. "He'll be at the club," he said. "You pick me up there. I want to talk with you."

It struck Fredericka that she too wanted to see Robert Enderby. There were matters between them now that called for explanation. She had to know, and with certainty, about the proxy stock. If she could not trust Bob Enderby, whom on a darkened earth could she trust?

People were pressing around her; eager Ruyland faces put questions, made suggestions. Mahlon was assuring her that she held the whip hand now, that the insurgent coalition, augmented by her large block of stock, could dictate terms, could even depose Augusta Ruyland or at least throttle her power. Fredericka wished wearily that they would stop talking. Her heart was so heavy with the shame and wrath of Kennion's treachery. . . . At least, she could make the old despot sweat for this day's work.

The meeting had adjourned formlessly. In the chair of authority the Grandante sat, quite still. Ruyland Tompkins spoke to her. She shook her head. John and Peter W., 3d, pottered up and pottered about, were mildly urgent in her ears. She brushed at them, buzzing, and they buzzed away.

From the door Selah B. glanced anxiously back. "I don't like her looks," he said to Keedrick. "She's working herself up to one of her explosions."

"Best leave her alone, then," advised the prudent Keedrick. "You'll only make her worse if you try to interfere."

Slowly the room emptied.

The old lady sat with her head propped on one jeweled fist, bemused by a vision. What she saw was a mansion of outward pomp and power, but with its supports rotted by long arrogance, worm-riddled by the hidden angers bred of tyranny, weakened by their own rigidity of tradition, a structure doomed from within. If The Rock itself, shot through with the illumination of a lightning flash, had stood starkly revealed as an edifice of paste-board and glue, she would have experienced no blacker wrath of disillusionment than that which rose within her like a destroying flame.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

TRANQUILLITY and Carter sat on the box of the Ruyland barouche waiting outside Factory Three. A long wait it had been, but the aged negro did not mind, though the gleamy black horses did. They lacked his virtue of patience, belonging to a species which is never broken as completely as the human kind. Ruylands of all sizes, shapes, and ages emerged from the building, and to each the coachman accorded his bow and his greeting by name. He knew and always had known every Ruyland, great and small; had concentrated upon them, in fact, until the rest of humanity for him was made up of ghosts and shadow-stuff, practically indistinguishable one from another. Each departing Ruyland gave him a word in return for his; not to be courteous to old Carter would have involved the Grandante's severe displeasure.

Only Selah B. stopped for more than a formal accost. "I think you'd better go in and get her," said he.

"Yes, suh, Mr. Seel'," assented Carter. But he hadn't the faintest notion of doing so, being far too sapient in self-preservation. "Tha's a mighty fine showin' of candy roses you made at the Libr'y exhibition." Selah B. was pleased, for Carter had once been a gardener and was scholarly in the matter of flowers. But Carter was troubled in his mind.

Tranquillity deserted that mind completely at sight of Augusta Ruyland at the door. Her face was perfectly controlled and perfectly rigid except for her eyebrows which twitched incessantly. Carter quaked. A few

times before he had witnessed that symptom, always as the forerunner of devastation. What had they been doing to his ol' Missus?

She walked slowly to the barouche while he climbed down. She seemed to be looking at him, but Carter felt like a disembodied spirit, like a pane of clear glass under that regard, so sure was he that she did not see him at all. He made the error of saying:

"Ain't you feelin' right, Mis' Ruyland?"

"Certainly. Mind your business."

"Cert'n'y," echoed Carter. He minded his business for sixty vacant seconds before venturing: "Where to, Mis' Ruyland?"

"What?"

"Where'll I drive to?"

"Drive to the devil and be damned to your black soul!"

"Yessum," accepted Carter in a strive-to-please tone. "You get in now, Mis' Ruyland?" He insinuated a hand under her elbow. She shook it off.

"*You* get in," she directed.

Carter moaned out: "Oh, Mis' Augusta!"

"*Get in!*"

Her mouth was a broadened flat line, which a less knowledgeable person might have mistaken for a smile. Not Carter. He still hesitated nevertheless. Her hand fell on the whip. Carter cringed away; his own father had known a Ruyland lash in the way of just correction long after slavery had been officially banished from New England. He crept into his mistress's seat. Augusta Ruyland mounted the box with the agility of a young girl, and took the lines. The whip sang in the air once and again. The outraged horses sprang forward. At the first corner Carter was whirled into the street, lay still for a moment, and then crawled brokenly to the safety of the sidewalk.

Policeman No. 27 was a veteran of the force. He knew Habersham's traditions of the Ruylands, including one special to the force, of a day long-buried in years, the day on which Augusta Ruyland had heard the implacable verdict of science that her son could not live; when, rabid as a stricken dog, she had driven her wild black team of those days in the rabid dog's straight line through the town's main thoroughfare. Three officers and several citizens had gone to hospital as the result of that outbreak. There had been a subsequent enrichment of the police fund and an unwritten but abiding memory in police annals. No. 27 heard and saw and remembered and acted. His whistle shrilled, long, loud, and imperious. Other whistles took up and bore the alarm far down the street. Policeman 27 was in the gutter now, reflecting with his dimming consciousness that the Ruylands would take care of him and his family, whatever happened. He had done his best. It served, too. The signal still ran. Habersham was clearing the way for its ruler, run amuck.

Outside the Habersham Club Fredericka espied the two men for whom she sought. They were standing at the curb, near Robert Enderby's closed car. As she drew closer the young wife was struck with the difference in their faces. Kennion's was flushed with strong feeling and, she suspected, another equally strong agency. Enderby's had that hard-drawn look of the man determined at all costs to maintain control of himself. Kennion seemed undecided as to what next to do. It occurred to his wife as quite within the disastrous possibilities that he would swing his clenched hand into the other's face. She hurried forward.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Kennion.

"I want to see Bobby."

"Alone?" The husband's tone was become courteously interrogatory.

"No. With you."

"This isn't the best possible place, do you think?" said Enderby, with a quick glance which apprised Fredericka that Kennion was not to be trusted in his then condition.

"Can't we get into your car, then?"

"I won't set foot in his car," returned Kennion. "He says I'm a liar."

"I beg your pardon, Ruyland. I haven't said anything—"

"You won't believe that in voting your stock I acted in good faith."

"Nor I," said Fredericka.

"No, you wouldn't," he returned with breathless violence, "being my wife."

"Thank you for remembering it," she returned in an uninterpretable tone. She turned to Enderby. "Why did you deliver that stock to Kennion?"

"Why not? When I suggested that as a plan you made no objection."

"Did he ask you for the proxy?"

"Certainly not."

She considered that. Was he lying? It would be like chivalrous Bobby, in his care lest he put either her or Kennion in a false position, one toward the other. He would be incapable of assuming, unless it were forced upon him, that her husband would take any action hostile to her interests. Well, that was all right. He at least had played fair, though the results had been catastrophic.

"What did you want to mix up in this business for, anyway, Enderby?" catechized Kennion, his eyes hot upon the other man.

A swift temptation, perverse and mischievous, darted into and took possession of Fredericka's mind, ousting her better judgment. "Yes," she backed up her husband tauntingly; "what did you want to do it for?"

Enderby smiled at her, a smile that faded into wistfulness. "You see," he said gravely, "I happen, unfortunately, to be in love with you. It complicates matters, doesn't it?" He turned to Kennion a composed face. "It's a thing that happened to me very long ago and has never stopped happening, though I hoped that it would. So, I think, if you'll allow me to turn my stock over to your wife—oh, for any consideration you think fit, of course—I'll leave Habersham and stop mixing up in this affair."

"Don't leave Habersham," said Fredericka breathlessly, taken unawares.

Kennion looked from one to the other, smiled, and threw up his hand. It was a graceful little motion, too casual for despair, too indefinite for surrender, but suggestive of both; graceful and insouciant, as a fencer after a hurtful thrust might smile as he said "*Touché*." Oh, Kennion could be game enough in the gestures of life!

"I'm going home," said Fredericka with an effort. She wanted to think.

She turned and saw Juggernaut thundering down the street.

Some miracle of poise and adroitness had held Augusta Ruyland still firm in the high seat. The horses, maddened, were wholly out of control. She had lost the lines and sat there, her face implacable in its calm expectancy, waiting for the outcome with the courage of her pride. Traffic scuttled away before her like small fry before a plunging pike.

From the shock and dismay of that apparition, Fred-

ericka's mind gave one swift recoil, then became instinctively prophetic. She knew what was going to happen; what must obviously happen. No need to read Kennion's startled, aroused face for that. He would try to stop the furious blacks, and be killed in the attempt. He would surrender to the Grandante in death as he had in life, and she, his wife, would hate him for it with a remorseful hatred that would poison the rest of her years. He must not do it! She sprang at him with outflung arms to enwrap and hold him.

But Kennion, almost as swift of mind as she, read something of her project. He struck aside her groping hands before they could fasten upon him, and was off and up the road to meet the runaway.

"Bob! Stop him!" choked the girl, and was speaking to vacancy. For, a fraction of a second before Kennion, Enderby was sprinting at top speed. Of course! It would be that way. The ancient Juggernaut, perched there so calm above human turmoil and agony, was going to kill both, husband and lover. A sort of clear-sighted apathy possessed her mind. Later she could perhaps reason out what all this meant to her. Now she must see, observe, miss no detail.

Instinct, bred out of long awareness to opportunity, which is the basis of all physical expertness, teaches the trained athlete the best point and fittest method of attack. The two runners spread apart, as if by signal, one on each side, stopped, stood, waited, and at the moment, flung themselves forward and dashed along parallel with the team, snatching at the bridles. There followed a sickening sense of bodies being dragged, fierce hooves kicking in a cloud of obscuring dust, a crash as the clogged equipage brought up against a stationary automobile at the curb, a wild flurry, shouts and cries.

Fredericka darted forward, plunged through the rap-

idly forming circle of the crowd, and saw the Grandante get up from her knees and brush herself off with feline composure. The eyes of the two women met.

"Where is Kennion?" demanded the older.

"Where's Bob?" cried the girl in the first, all-forgetful abandon of full realization.

Kennion came limping around the automobile where he had been thrown; she hardly gave him a look. There was a huddle of clothing half under the collapsed right wheel of the barouche. Fredericka tugged at it frantically. Others helped her. A smeared face lifted itself blindly out of the mess and Fredericka drooped her own to it, closer, closer, until, heedless of the circle about them, she found his lips with the warmth and terror and passion of her own. She saw consciousness come back into the eyes, consciousness and with it a long, possessive look that, for the moment, set them apart from the world. Suddenly there seemed too little air to breathe; she was fighting for it as she was lifted away from him.

"I'm all right," she protested, and heard Bobby say in a cautious tone, answering some officious inquiry: "I think I've sprained my thumb."

Back of them the Grandante was issuing curt orders. "Phone for an ambulance, some of you. Get Dr. Stanley. . . . Kennion, don't rest your weight on that leg. . . . Better lie quiet, Enderby. That's a nasty lump on your head. . . . That off horse will have to be shot. . . . You man, there, see if you can find a flask under the seat." She covered every point with her practical sense until Dr. Stanley arrived. "This young man first," she directed, pointing to the half-dazed Enderby. Ruylands could wait; *noblesse oblige*.

"One minute. What's wrong with you, Augusta?" queried the old physician, looking at her narrowly.

"Nothing," she replied.

As if in acknowledgment of his interest, she swept him a slow, elaborate curtsey. But there was no resurgence from the movement. Instead there crumpled at his feet a silky, black whorl against which the whiteness of the set old face looked dull, sparkless, and ominous.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

TANBARK muffling the streets along the moated side of The Rock. Trolley cars routed away from the silenced mansion. A long succession of Ruylands, repetitiously calling, morning, afternoon, and evening, for tidings. Carter, with a boarded and slung arm, and a portentous face, very important at the door about his guardedly pessimistic statements. Miss Owen within, graver and more pessimistic to the privileged few admitted beyond the door. Mr. Dawley Cole, the public reporter, trotting in and trotting out with an expression of silence, doom, and the knowledge of weighty secrets.

Over all the voiceless factories a pall of apprehension and instability, extending even into the strike headquarters. It was all very well to rebel against the tyranny of Augusta Ruyland. But what if Augusta Ruyland died? Where would that leave them? To them the Company meant little except as Augusta Ruyland embodied its gross power and pride. Without her it would be but an unsubstantial impersonality. With the best good will, the most righteous of causes, it is difficult to strike against a ghost. The mutineers were appalled.

All Habersham was, in fact, appalled. Ruylands had died before, though seldom, being a long-lived race after they once got started, and the world had continued successfully to rotate without them; but never since the misty and hallowed Founder of the Business had there been a Ruyland as essential as the Grandante. Forebodings took on added gravity in that Dr. Stanley had been called in to take charge of the case, at the insist-

ence, it was whispered, of the headless family council. Any such procedure as the abandonment of an old enmity on the Grandante's part argued that she must be *in extremis*. Dr. Stanley came and went, twice a day, maintaining a professionally inscrutable face and impenetrable reticence. At the end of a fortnight after the accident, a rumor ran insanely through the town to the effect that Mrs. Ruyland had died several days earlier and been secretly interred within the walled confines of The Rock.

As soon as the report reached Fredericka Ruyland's ears, she acted. Not that she credited it, but it crystalized her need to get some inkling of where they all stood. If all the Ruyland world were to remain in a state of suspended animation, pending the issue of the stricken septuagenarian's illness, she, upon whom unforeseen responsibilities had been thrust, must know what was to be expected. She decided to hold up Dr. Stanley for the information, not minimizing in her own mind the difficulties of such a process. She was waiting in his office when he returned from a noon visit to The Rock.

The old physician did not this time give her his quizzical look, followed by his favorite query of earlier days: "Anything in my line?" He covered her with one appraising glance over his heavy glasses and said: "If you will lose sleep you must expect to lose weight also."

"Never mind me," returned the girl. "Is Mrs. Ruyland going to die?"

"Probably. Most of us do."

"Don't be tricky. Now, I mean. Soon."

"Why so impatient, Fredericka?"

That he could take the tone of teasing told volumes to the sharpened apprehension of Fredericka. "It's only the uncertainty that I'm impatient of."

"Life is all uncertainty," pronounced the medical oracle.

"Dr. Henry, won't you please tell me what you really think?"

"Why are you trying to force my professional secrecy?"

"Because I've got just all I can stand," she burst out. "Do you realize that I'm the biggest stockholder in the Company, with her shares out?"

"I had heard that John has her proxy," he murmured.

"What if he has? There are enough votes against her policy and his to beat the other side, and they're looking to me to take some step to end the strike."

Dr. Stanley's withering lips pursed for a whistle, which made no noise. "I hadn't thought of that."

"And I'm only twenty-five," said Fredericka, quivering.

"My dear!" He took her hand between his and patted it. "I'll help you as much as I can, which won't be much, I'm afraid. What do you want to know first?"

"Exactly what her condition is."

"I should say," he responded with a return of his earlier twinkle, "that it becomes less alarming and more difficult every day."

"Was she badly hurt?"

"Bodily? No. Shaken up more than is good for her. She's recovered from that part of it."

"Then what is the matter with her?"

There was a peculiar intonation to his answer: "If this were war, I'd diagnose it as shell-shock. You'll find some interesting notes on shell-shock on that third shelf if you care to run through them while I do a bit of telephoning."

He gave her ample time for her research. Upon his return he quizzed: "What did you find out?"

"There doesn't seem to be any such thing as shell-shock, really."

"Well," he drawled, "it hasn't much to do with shells, to be sure, but it has a good deal to do with shock of one kind or another. Such a shock as a very set mind might suffer from discovering that the world wasn't made to order for any one particular individual."

"Then she isn't any more likely to die than I am," interpreted Fredericka.

But the conservative doctor was not going to go that far. "Oh, I wouldn't say that! Her expectation of life isn't nearly up to yours. She's seventy-two years old, you know."

"Just shamming," insisted his visitor.

"No; I wouldn't quite say that, either."

She beguiled him with eyes and voice. "Tell me, Henry Stanley, has she always shammed?"

"If she has, it's been mainly to herself," he answered, and continued indignantly: "There, you've made me betray my patient, with your sirenish wiles. You're a dangerous and unprincipled young woman. Leave my office at once. Unless you'd rather stay to lunch."

"Of course I'd rather. But I can't. I've got too much to do."

"I can see you've got too much to do," he rejoined meaningly. "Don't do it quite so hard."

The beauty of Fredericka's face grew rigid with the look of harassment that dimmed it. "I've got to."

"Young woman, I'm coming around to the house to give you a talking to one of these early evenings."

"Don't come to the house."

"Not? Going away?"

"Gone. I'm staying with the Ransome Cases in their apartment."

"And Kennion?"

"He's staying at The Rock. He was sent for right after the accident—and kept."

"Ah?" His rimmed eyes searched her face. "I'm sorry," said he. "But I'm not surprised. Perhaps I'm not altogether sorry either." He smiled. "It isn't for the sons of Ruylands to try to tame demigoddesses," he opined. "There's a legend about that somewhere. Or if there isn't, there ought to be—with lightning in it."

"May I go and see her?" queried Fredericka from the door.

"Better not," he advised, "speaking as a physician for his patient."

Understandable enough, that was to her. If Augusta Ruyland was in a state of self-maintained hysteria, as Dr. Stanley evidently wished understood, the sight of her arch-enemy, the head and front of the opposition, could not but be hurtful to her. But if she could not go in person, an emissary might. Mrs. Gage had been in town for several days, staying at the Ruyland Arms Inn.

"Why don't you go and see Mrs. Ruyland?" Fredericka asked her.

"I have been," returned Mrs. Gage placidly.

Her daughter stared. "You never said anything to me about it."

"There was little to say. Besides, she asked me not to."

"How did she seem?"

"Low in her mind. She seems to be a highly expert invalid. What the Grandante does, she does thoroughly well."

Fredericka chuckled. Trust Anna Demorest Gage not to be fooled by any wile of fellow woman. "If you went again, there might be more to say."

"Went as your partisan, you mean?"

"You'd always be my partisan, motherkin. Why try to bluff your loving but knowing child?"

"But I'm *her* partisan, as it happens, in a way."

The girl's eyes crinkled at the corners. "How do you get in a way like that?"

"Because I'm so sorry for her."

"Wouldn't she eternally hate you if she could hear you say it!"

"Don't you see the tragedy of what you're saying, Ricky? Nobody's ever been sorry for her."

"She's never wanted 'em to be."

"So, now," pursued the other, "she's being sorry for herself, and it's a painful process."

"Let her be as sorry for herself as she likes. What I object to is *your* shedding the briny tear for her."

"No, you don't really object."

Fredericka caught the pudgy little woman into a quick, hard hug. "Of course I don't, angel-heart! But I'm curious about it."

"About why I pity her? For several reasons. One of them is that she's just discovered how lonely it is to be alone."

"Whose fault is it that she's alone?"

"Ask the generations back of her. She was born to power and to that belief in infallibility that underlies power when nobody dares challenge it. You and I, Ricky, can see where we're sometimes right and sometimes wrong. She can only see where she's always right and everybody else always wrong. That's what makes her so lonely."

"I'm right in this, though, and I know I'm right," asserted Fredericka.

Her mother replied by a strange hypothesis. "Suppose Augusta Ruyland were to die to-night and her soul should pass into you; what would you do with the poor, blind thing?"

"But I'm not like her!" cried the girl, ever sensitive

to the other's under-meanings, so close were their spirits attuned. "Not in one little, tiny particular."

"What you just said about knowing that you were right sounded like an echo, though."

"Motherkin, what are you asking me to do?"

To the direct query Mrs. Gage gave no answer unless her "I'll go to The Rock this afternoon" could be regarded as a response, which, indeed, in some sense it was. The daughter so accepted it, for she said with intensity: "I won't give up Choral Three to her, mother. I can't give up Choral Three. Norval—"

"Yes, Norval," agreed the older woman. "Living or dead, the Ruylands bind those that come into their charmed circle, don't they?"

"Wouldn't you have me live up to that bond?"

"Being a woman myself, I would. We have to live up to the expectations of the men who love us, even though we don't love them. I could wish, sometimes, that I'd never been born a woman, except that, in that case, I'd probably have been born a man."

"It seems likely," admitted Fredericka. "What kind of a man would Mrs. Ruyland have been, motherkin?"

"Oh, an unhappy kind of man, I presume; just as she's an unhappy kind of woman."

"Why are you harping so on the tragedy of it?" demanded the girl suspiciously. "I ask you, is it fair just when I've got things coming my way a little to try and melt me all up? She's had everything her way all her life."

"Do you realize that when victory has been the everyday portion, even a small defeat takes on the measure of a catastrophe?"

"You're becoming epigrammatic and subtle and all kinds of things, Anna Demorest Gage!" complained the girl. "And I know I haven't a Chinaman's chance with

you when you're in that mind. In words of one syllable—what do you want of me?"

"I don't know yet," was the peaceful reply.

"Then go and see the old devil that you're so sorry for, you turncoat, and come back and tell me, and mold me around like a piece of putty as you always do when you want to." Fredericka hustled her mother into a wrap and kissed her once and again. "But no compromise on Choral Three, mind you."

The emissary found Augusta Ruyland stretched on a couch in the small library, a picture of pious debility. Some of the eighteenth century, faintly blue window glass had survived in this wing of the house, and it cast a convincing pallor over the still face with its closed eyes. Clever of her! thought the observant visitor. She put the customary inquiries and received the intimation that the patient was a little better, thank you, imparted in a voice which clearly indicated (and was meant to indicate) that she was not long for this weary earth, but was determined to put a brave face upon it while she lasted. Miss Owen tiptoed in, peered at the invalid, tinkled a spoon in a glass, said "Time for your medicine, dear," helped her to it, and tiptoed out, finger to lip and with uplifted glance which plainly intimated that in *her* opinion the world would be fortunate if Augusta Ruyland survived the day. It was quite perfectly dramatized, the more so in that the little secretary (who would have had the top of her head taken off with neatness and dispatch had she called the Grandante "dear" in that formidable person's hours of health) had no intention of playing a rôle. Neither had Mrs. Gage, who extracted some apparatus from a bag and set peacefully to knitting. This rather impaired the effect.

After some minutes Augusta Ruyland spoke in a voice decidedly less funereal. "Do stop that clicking."

Mrs. Gage had clicked just twice. Too tactful to mention the fact, she put aside her work. "Nerves?" she inquired not unsympathetically.

"Certainly not," was the indignant response. "Nerves are all folderol."

"Oh," said Mrs. Gage, placid and noncommittal.

When Augusta Ruyland spoke again, there was in her tone and manner an echo of hymnal music and the scent of mortuary lilies. "Why hasn't Fredericka been to see me?"

"Did you want to see her?"

"No."

"That's why."

The Grandante snorted, which was an error. Those who sink softly to a well-merited final rest in the sweet consciousness of a life nobly spent in the service of others do not snort. Or, if they do, they should not. It mars the climax.

"Are you catching cold?" inquired the ever-tactful visitor, pretending that it was a sneeze.

"I never catch cold," returned the Grandante, out of the rôle again. "Where is she?"

"Fredericka? Just at present she is at some sort of factory meeting."

"She would be! Why isn't she ever at home lately?" (Evidently the old lady had not so far lost her grip on life and its temporal interests but what she kept track of the trend of affairs, probably through Dawley Cole.)

"She's staying with Elberta Case."

"Visiting?"

"You might call it visiting."

The Grandante propped herself up on an elbow. Her clear old eyes snapped. "Then she's deserted Kennion," she interpreted.

Mrs. Gage smiled. That smile meant too many things

for the Grandante. She took a defensive-plaintive tone. "Hasn't she?"

"Do you think you're strong enough to discuss these things?"

"I don't care whether I'm strong enough or not; I'm going to discuss 'em." The hovering spirit of Death had folded his sable wings and hastily slunk hence. "If your daughter isn't woman enough to live with Kennion and bear him children—"

"She's woman enough. She isn't sheep enough."

"Then let her leave him free to marry some woman that will. Is she woman enough for that?"

Again Mrs. Gage smiled, but it was quite a different smile from the first. "She's too much woman not to," said she softly. She was thinking of Robert Enderby.

"Mind you, I don't hold with divorce generally," declared the old lady. "It's just a part of this newfangled looseness and irresponsibility."

"Mostly," agreed the pleasant-faced little lady, resuming her knitting. "I'll try not to click," she promised.

"Oh, click ahead if you want to!" cried the other. "You always get your own way, don't you?"

"No, thank God! Do you?"

Augusta Ruyland swung her legs off the couch and straightened her slim, flat back, the better to bring herself eye to eye with her visitor. "Anna Louise Demorest, you're a deep woman! I'm afraid of you."

"You've never been afraid of anything or anybody in your life."

"I used to think that of myself. Now I don't know. Why do you want Fredericka and Kennion to separate?"

"I thought it was you who proposed it."

"But you want it, too. More than I, I think."

"Question of morality," said the placid knitter.

"Morality indeed! What kind of morality?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't make you understand. If I were to say that I don't consider it moral for two people to live together when love and respect are gone—"

"Live together! They're *married*, aren't they?"

"Do you think there's no such thing as an immoral marriage?"

"Not as immoral as divorce," asserted the old lady. "Till death do us part."

"What death? The death of love? That's a living death for a woman."

"You're playing with words," said the Grandante scornfully.

"Perhaps I am. After all, words are the only mediums we have for expressing truth."

"I'm willing to go against my own conscience," pursued the other with her finest effect of making a tremendous concession, "rather than see Fredericka ruin Kennion's life."

"Do you think Fredericka is likely to do that?"

"She has done it."

"Oh, I'd hardly say that Kennion's life is ruined," observed the other soothingly. "It's been knocked a little out of gear by too much interference. Human lives are pretty delicate machinery to be tinkering with. Even God doesn't do it much, you know. Afraid to, I should think."

"I suppose you mean that I do."

Mrs. Gage continued to knit clicklessly.

"All my life," declared Augusta Ruyland, "I've striven and managed and sacrificed to make other people happy. You won't believe that, though."

"I believe it implicitly."

"And look at the results. It's the black ingratitude of it all!" said the Grandante, pitying herself very much.

"People are queer, you see," kindly explained Mrs.

Gage. "We all want to be happy; but we want to be happy in our own way, not in somebody else's. As soon as somebody else tries to force a special pattern of happiness on us, we turn obstinate and become miserable. Most reprehensible of us."

"Are you laughing at me, Anna Louise Demorest?"

"If you'd had somebody to laugh at you any time this last fifty years, instead of keeping them all so cowed—"

"I didn't," denied the Grandante with a smirk. "Anyway, we Ruylands aren't laughing people."

"Kennion is, or was. And Freddy was ready to laugh with him. But you spoiled that for them."

"I'll look after Kennion," averred the old autocrat proudly.

"For God's sake, don't! Give the boy a chance next time."

A real pallor sharpened the old face. "I don't know what you mean."

"Then I'd better tell you even if it hurts. When you've lost the power to make people's happiness and keep only the power to mar it, isn't it about time to quit?"

"I'd rather have that power than none," stated the old lady, nakedly honest in the face of that unexpected challenge.

Mrs. Gage sighed. "You're too old to change, of course. Do you want me to go now?"

"No." Augusta Ruyland sat silent for a minute. When she resumed it was with a palpable effort. "I want you to tell me about the mills."

"They open next week."

The old lady set her hands to her temples with a lamentable gesture. "Ring for Miss Owen, please. I've got to go down at once."

"I wouldn't if I were you. You'll only spoil things."

"You'd have me sit quiet and let the strikers go back, on their own terms, I suppose!" she cried rancorously. "Is Christian Borck here?"

"Yes. I had a talk with him yesterday."

"What did he have to say?"

"He sent his best wishes for your recovery and said if you were well enough to hear it, to congratulate you on having won out this time—"

"Won out! What does he mean by won out?"

"—but that he'd get you next time," concluded the caller. "The men are going back without unionizing," she added.

"But what are the terms?" cried the Grandante.

"The discharged workers are back."

This answer galvanized Augusta Ruyland's rigid form to a single, sudden spasm. "Who did that?"

"Two of your old men seem to have been the main factors in it—Coleson and Ainsworth—though they weren't taken back themselves. I don't understand the inside politics of the thing."

The Grandante breathed easier. To that extent, at least, the face of her authority was saved. "The other demands?" she queried. "Free speech and all that bosh and nonsense?"

Mrs. Gage's smile was distinctly sympathetic. "Your Ruyland workmen are a queer lot," she remarked. "They got the notion into their heads that you were going to die—"

"Yes; they'd like to see me. I'll show 'em yet!"

"That's the last thing they want." She laughed. "The superstition seems to be," she continued, "that the closing down of the factories is, in some mysterious way, shutting off your life; a kind of circulation of the blood effect; and that if you die while they're still quiet, they'll never come to life again."

"Afraid of their jobs, are they?" commented the old lady grimly.

"You can take that view of it. But it's more than that. You're so much a tradition to them, you've taken root in their imaginations, until they've come to think of you as the embodiment of the mills; just as a few rulers in history have become, for their people, the embodiment of their nations. But this is more like the priestess and prophetess kind of thing. It's very curious."

"How much of my tradition will be left," said the Grandante with concentrated bitterness, "when the factories open up again without my orders? That's your daughter's doing."

"She couldn't help it. It was forced on her."

But the corrosive of active suspicion was now burning into the spirit of Augusta Ruyland. "She wants to make herself head of the mills," she accused. "She's scheming to take my place."

"At her age? She's only twenty-five, with the best of her life still before her."

"I was twenty-four when Mr. Ruyland died."

There was the desolation of lonely power in the quiet statement. A sense of the appalling length of years struck in upon the listener; years of soul-narrowing and monotonous authority, of obligations loyally met, responsibilities unhesitatingly accepted, the pleasures of life forgone—perhaps not even considered. She closed her eyes for a moment and saw a picture like the mental presentment of a delirium; a straight, proud figure in a black silk dress, harnessed in a thousand interlapping and shadowy bonds, and drawing after it by its own traction a multitude of phantasms which seemed fainter images of itself, upon a flat and arid path that ran long, and straight, and dusty to the grave. The set face of the wayfarer was neither happy nor unhappy. It was tired.

An access of dread wrenched the mind of the vision-seer. Soon or late the valiant plodder must falter and drop—and another assume the shadowy harness and take her place?

"Not Fredericka, dear God!" prayed the mother inwardly.

A desire followed upon the fear, the wish that the old woman before her might once, somewhere, somehow, have had her day of respite, have known the joy and passion of living, if it were only for memory now. And she put to Augusta Ruyland the most intimate and searching question that ever the old ears had heard.

"Did you love your husband?"

"No," said Augusta Ruyland drearily.

Mrs. Gage rose and went away, leaving her knitting where it had dropped. She needed air to breathe. As for the work, it didn't matter, since she was coming back anyway. Her day's mission now revealed itself as only half completed.

Fredericka was nonplused at the precipitancy with which her mother came upon her. It was Mrs. Gage's wont to move quietly upon her purpose. But her first question, put to her daughter, had an overtone of impetuosity.

"Who is the most informed Ruyland of the lot?"

Fredericka peered at her curiously. "Business or family?" she inquired. "Mahlon is my chief support."

"Then we'll have him for one, as representing the business side. Now, who understands Augusta Ruyland best?"

"That would be Selah B., I should think," opined the girl. "He's a wise old bird, anyway."

"Could you get both of them here this afternoon?"

"What are you plotting, motherkin mine?"

"I'm being an old fool. I'm trying to take a hand in people's lives. In spite of the horrible example I've just left," she added with a tight smile.

"Blathers!" retorted her daughter disrespectfully. "You've always run everything you've come near. But you do it so quietly that nobody ever finds you out until it's too late. That's where I get my developing lust for power, I expect."

Anxiety narrowed the restful, palish eyes of Mrs. Gage. "Is that true, Ricky? Are you really getting that way?"

The girl rose and stretched her arms above her head, her lithe young body bending in the slow curve of a bow and with a bow's tautness of unleashed energies, of immanent vigor. "I like it as far as I've gone. Perhaps it's only that too much Augusta has got on my nerves and I'm spoiling for the fight."

Mrs. Gage's slowly shaken head was the essence of negation. "That fight is over," she said.

Said Mahlon: "It's the business I'm thinking of. That and Choral Three."

"But she hasn't carried out her threat against Choral Three," pointed out Selah B. Ruyland.

"Because she hasn't been up to any active devilment. She will."

"She won't," said Mrs. Gage composedly.

"How can you be sure of anything about her? If she touches the club house now the fat is in the fire for good."

"That's Borck's last hope," said Fredericka.

"If she has to choose between Borck and you," said Mahlon to Fredericka, "she'll take you. You're a Ruyland, after all."

"Are you, Ricky?" queried the even, significant accents of Mrs. Gage.

A shade of dread overcast the vividness of the girl's

face. The name had begun to take on a weight of its own, in unreckonable responsibilities. She did not answer.

"What do you intend to make of my daughter?" The question was put to Mahlon.

"Anything she wants to be. She's got the biggest interest in the Company now, except Mrs. Ruyland's, and our combination can control the stock between us. What she doesn't know about the business end—and she's learned more than I'd have thought possible, in working with Norval—Peter and I can supply. The work people are solidly behind her. She can boss the business from behind or from in front, whichever she likes."

Fredericka's face was heavy with thought. Old Selah B.'s voice broke in upon her reflections. "It's just a question of how much you're ready to give up, my dear." His eyes were very gentle as they met hers. In a flash she suspected that he somehow knew. "Be sure that you realize the price to be paid," he warned.

A sudden panic took hold upon her. Give up Bob? After that moment when she had held him in her arms, not knowing whether he was alive or dead? She realized then that she could never do it. But her imperious spirit still revolted at the thought that she must make such a choice. Mahlon put in his word again.

"If you back out now, where do you leave Choral Three?"

"Yes," Her gaze was defiant upon the old man. "What about that?"

"Dicker," he smiled. "Trade your power for a free deed to the property. That's politics."

"She'll never do it."

"She'll have to do it," said Mrs. Gage. "Leave that to me."

"Are you against me too, mother?"

"No. I'm for you. I'm a little for her too."

"More than a little, I think," returned the girl jealously. "After what she's done to me, why should you want to save her from what's coming to her?"

"I want to save you from what's already come to her," was the grave reply. "You can destroy her power and perhaps set up your own. But if you do, daughter of mine, you're committed. If you tear down, you must build up again. A life for a life, Ricky. Your life for hers, and with yours the lives of others. Is it worth it?"

The girl dropped her arm around her mother's shoulder. "No," she breathed.

Selah B. rose and made her a bow. "Be thankful that you were born a woman and not a Ruyland," he said, "and let Augusta Ruyland work out her own fate to the end. There isn't much Ruylandism left in this hurrying, practical world. It's a picturesque survival. It has its graces, too; its qualities, its special humanities and loyalties, and Augusta represents them perhaps as well as any one could. Let The Rock stand while she lives. She'll be the last of the feudal Ruylands. Let her die without the bitterness of open defeat."

Fredericka Ruyland did a beautiful and graceful thing. She went to the old man, bent to him and kissed him. "If only because you once loved her," she whispered.

"You must make my peace with Mahlon, though," she added aloud, "for giving up our fight."

"You're not giving it up," said he. "Call it a draw. The best we ever get out of life is a draw, and that's only temporary before the final knockout."

Fredericka laughed a little uncertainly. "I never knew you were a sporting character, Cousin Selah," said she.

"Never! Never!! Never!!!" cried Augusta Ruyland.

"I'll hold the club house until either Choral Three is dead or I am."

Patiently Mrs. Gage set herself to argue. It was a withered palm of pretended victory, the best that she could hold out as her offer; the illusion of power where the reality had passed. She quoted Selah B., "The best we ever get out of life is a draw"; but to the despot who had known only the long succession of triumphs over her opponents a drawn battle was as inglorious as defeat itself. Yet in the end, worn down with the accumulated evidences of her imminent overthrow if she persisted, the Grandante gave in.

"Let them have their Choral Three." For a moment she brightened. "I'll make it an occasion that Habershams will never forget," she promised, the autocrat's love of pomp flashing out. "But," she added savagely, as that vision faded, "it would have been better if those young fools had let the horses run."

"Is that what you intended?" asked Mrs. Gage, aghast.

"Of course," said Augusta Ruyland.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

KENNION's letter was no surprise to his wife. In it he had thrown up his hands, was going away for a long time, ostensibly on a Company investigation, realized that it had all been a dismal mistake for her. Whatever she wanted him to do would be done; if she wished to be free, he would further any arrangement she might make. The letter was free of bitterness; not without its own wistful dignity. Fredericka marveled at her unmoved soul, that she was stirred to nothing more than a shamed resentment. "I'm apparently not worth fighting for," she thought angrily.

Another letter, this one by special messenger, from Robert Enderby, moved her more deeply, perhaps more angrily. Enderby was also going away, after having had a talk with Mrs. Augusta Ruyland, who was urgent for him to remain now; but "you will understand and not hold it against me," he wrote, "that Habersham now seems a little more than I can stand." Hurriedly she read on to what she took to be "I don't expect that I shall see you before I go," and then the offer of his stock certificates, which he enclosed, on her own terms. "I'm not even worth waiting for," reflected the girl bitterly. She felt a sharp distrust of herself, of the hitherto victorious charm of her womanhood; a self-pitying incredulous wonder, verging close upon something as near humility as the proud Fredericka had ever experienced. Her mother, sapient woman, would have judged it a salutary lesson to her pride, whilst being a little sorry for her.

She sought reassurance in trying to read between the

lines of Enderby's brief communication, and made a discovery that startled her. What he had actually written was not "I don't expect that I shall see you before I go," but "before you go." What might that mean? And why should the Grandante be urgent for him to stay on the job "now." How much might be explained by that talk he had had with her? What latest devilment had the irrepressible old schemer been up to? Fredericka decided in a flash that it was time she herself had a talk, final and definitive, with Augusta Ruyland. She put on hat and coat and started for The Rock.

Her route led past Ransome Case's former office, now turned over to Enderby. The temporary occupant was visible inside, arranging his papers. Attuned in courage to one high emprise, the girl was quite ready to take another in her stride. She walked into the room without knocking and stood before him. Enderby jumped from his chair, looking hard and silently at his silent visitor for a long moment before he achieved a smile.

"Congratulations," said he, "on both counts."

"What's it all about, Bobby?" she asked.

"You've done the trick: beaten the unbeatable Augusta all along the line and won out both ways."

"Still I don't quite understand. What has she said to you?"

"Told me the glad news even before it got into the paper." He glanced at the *Courier* on the desk. She caught it up. "Society column," said he helpfully.

It headed Dawley Cole's social contributions, that item saying that Mr. and Mrs. Kennion G. Ruyland were leaving shortly for a trip to California, where they would spend the winter.

"I see," said Fredericka. Her eyes came up very slowly from the print to rest upon his face with an expression of wistful accusation. "And you believed it?"

"She told me in so many words that—"

"And you believed her rather than me?"

"Than you?" he repeated dully.

"After the runaway when I held you—and thought you were dead, for the moment—didn't you know—didn't you feel that there was a second when my heart almost stopped beating?"

"That's what I let myself believe," he answered eagerly and miserably, "and then—"

"And you thought, after that, that I could ever go back to him?" she cried passionately. "What kind of a woman do you think I am?"

"I wasn't sure that that moment when I came out of my unconsciousness was real."

"It was real if anything in the world was ever real!"

He caught her two shoulders in his grip. "Ricky!"

At that evocation of the old bond, he felt pass through her a slow, strong quiver which seemed to be of the body shaken by the soul. "Don't you want me any more, Bobby?" she murmured.

"I've never wanted any one else, not for a single moment," he muttered.

"Ah!" she said ruefully. "I thought I did. But I didn't. Not really. Not with the way—inside of me. I never could be Ricky to anybody else." She paused for good and sufficient reason. "Has it escaped your notice that that window is transparent?" she inquired breathlessly, backing away. Then: "Oh, Bobby, dear; I'm rather damaged, you know. A bit second-hand. Stripped of a lot of illusions, my touching faith in the world in general and myself in particular, and things like that. Are you sure—sure—"

He laughed, with triumphant tenderness. "I like your nerve, Ricky. I've been sure for ten years and you've been sure for ten seconds or so, and *you ask me!*"

"D'you know where I was going when I—well—happened in, Bobby?"

"To The Rock?" he guessed.

"Right. And what for?"

He pondered this. "To bite the Grandante painfully on the ear."

"Wrong. I was going to serve the Grandante with notice of divorce."

"Divorce from Kennion?"

"Oh, Kennion doesn't matter," she replied wearily. "Of course, it'll have to be from him, in form. But it's really from her. She's the one I've been really married to all this time. She's overshadowed my life here." She looked up at him, suddenly radiant. "I'm out of her shadow now."

"Would you want to stay here in Habersham, Ricky?" he asked gravely.

She shook her head with a little shudder. "No. I'd be too afraid for our happiness. I'll have to keep hold enough to protect Choral Three, but outside of that I'd want to go away—away—away—from every Ruyland on earth. . . . Don't you think you'd better come with me to The Rock, dear?"

"I'd like to," he confessed.

They went together out into the brave winter sun-glow. At the corner they came face to face with Augusta Ruyland, out for her first drive since her disability.

She saw the light on their faces. They saw the answering darkness on hers. Her head went up stiffly, her mouth hardened with pain and restraint. She returned their bow with all her unbending pride of courtesy and drove on, on her business of arranging for the great and bitter day of the Choral Three celebration.

"I don't believe we need go to The Rock after all," said Fredericka, softly and soberly.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

THE pomp and circumstance of the day were over.

A day of pride and glory it had been to Habersham, to the Company, above all to Augusta Ruyland. No gift in the long line of princely benefactions from the Ruyland family—so stated the Habersham *Evening Courier*—was so fitting, so generous, so significant, as the bestowal of the property leasehold, free of all encumbrance and qualification, to Choral Three. It marked, wrote the glorifying reporter, the peaceful settlement of a strike in which the Company was righteously victorious at every point.

(Fredericka Ruyland had laughed when she read this; but her mother purred; she wanted above all else, now, that the Grandante's defeat-scarified soul should be salved, and here was the bland ointment laid on with a lavish pen.)

Oratory there had been of bestowal and acceptance and congratulation. The Governor of the state, proud to prove a distant relationship with the Ruylands, had interrupted—or perhaps forwarded—a busy campaign by coming and making a fulsome speech. But the enthusiasm which approved him was as a zephyr compared to the tornado that acclaimed Augusta Ruyland. Through it all she was at her gracious, easy, dynamic and friendly best. But old Selah B.—who had once loved her—whispered into the ear of Dr. Stanley:

"You might better have let her die," and the grizzled healer said pityingly: "She can't, poor creature!"

At the end, the younger men of Choral Three had

taken the blacks, mystified and objecting, out of the shafts and had drawn her home to The Rock with their own hands. There she had dined with the sub-chieftains of the clan while listening politely to the hollow reverberation of further encomiums. They had gone away early, thank God, leaving her to her thoughts.

She walked out to the tower on the wall, the spot where she had so scornfully faced down the mob. Could it have been only three short months ago? The shattered window was still unrepaired. For weeks no Ruyland Company glazier would touch it, and as she had always had all repairs done by the Company corps of workmen, she declined to call in an outsider. Let it stand, she thought darkly; a petty symbol but, nevertheless, the first breach in the walls of that fortress, and made by a Ruyland hand. A sluggish night breeze stirred the hair at her temples. Below her:

The sounding city, rich and warm,
Smouldered and glistened in the plain,

the Habersham built and fostered and aggrandized by the steadfast generations of the Ruylands. A prophetess of their eventual downfall, destruction, absorption into a new and unknown system, she brooded over the restless panorama of the night. A line of her favorite Tennyson struck dull fire in her brain: "The old order changeth, giving place to new." She was of the old order, inflexible, unsundering, devoted by the stringent fatality of her heritage to the rigor of its tenets. The air pulsed softly, insistently about her; waves beating upon The Rock, the waves of the new; new ideas, new standards; new hopes and strivings and adjustments, beating as softly, as irresistibly as the waves of the all-dissolving years. What Ruyland would rule The Rock ten years hence? Twenty? A hundred? Would there be a Ruyland left in the world

at the end of the century, or any trace of that stern and sturdy tradition which was Ruylandism?

Shouts in the street below recalled her to a more personal trend. Some kind of fracas was in progress across from her, in front of the hotel. A taxi driver, strident and vituperative, and, in retort, a voice that she knew. Josephus, drunk and brawling in a public place. A Ruyland, sunk to that level! If Josephus had been guided by her he would not now be in such plight. A heat of impotent anger and disgust flashed through her veins. These petty and puny fools who tried to take destiny into their own hands rather than be guided by their betters! Elberta, too, whose modest apartment was just around the corner. She had chosen her own way and now she was doing her own cooking for a pauper engineer! Go chasing after her silly, childish notion of happiness, would she? Augusta Ruyland laughed vengefully. Fredericka was responsible for that rebellion and now Fredericka herself had turned rebel against the Ruylands. She would be free and would marry young Enderby and have children that ought to have been Ruyland children, would have been Ruyland children if the management of Ruyland affairs had been left to the head of all the Ruylands, as had been aforetime ordained. She could always have controlled Kennion, who was now on his way to the Far West. Another of her beneficent purposes gone awry.

The row in front of the hotel was composed, and a familiar figure was leading away the unstable Josephus. Dawley Cole, the ubiquitous reporter. Even at that distance her sharp old eyes could see that he had lost some of his comfortable rotundity, so that his once impeccable coat hung slack, his formerly deliberate and mincing gait had become a restless trot; the little man was descending into an anxious old age. Well, he had his chance;

he was fixed for life, for the Grandante's life anyway, and probably a snug little annuity after her death, had he behaved himself. But he was like the others. Loyalty was not in them, nor the sense of what was best for themselves, meaning submission to Ruyland authority.

The roar of the factories came dully up to her from out the sheltering gullies where they were strung. Night-shifts were busy catching up with the long-interrupted work. But the power that had revived the stilled wheels was not that of her authority; rather, it had been done in defiance of her, despite the blandishment of the evening paper, and the multiform congratulations and testimonials of the afternoon's ceremony. That train, coughing its way out of the West Habersham station, the ten-seventeen, had carried Sam Coleson and Ben Ainsworth away from their homes, those staunch retainers of a swiftly passing fealty: it was to their forbearance and sacrifice that the Grandante owed the continuance of her apparent authority; that and the traditional loyalty to her sovereignty when she was stricken and helpless. She saw it all now! The Ruyland factories were going, the Ruyland system functioning, the Ruyland autocracy still centered in her, to outward appearance—why? She owed that hollow triumph not to respect for her power, but to pity for her weakness. And Borck had sent his good-humored defiance, that he would get her yet, her and the mills. Probably.

The blighting conviction of her impotence in the closer relationships of the life she had once dominated so completely swept over her. She had fought the good fight, she assured her own soul passionately, piteously; she had kept the faith. Always she had thought and schemed and acted for the happiness of her clan, and they had rejected the boon. What was it that Mrs. Gage had said? That happiness made to pattern for others turns to mis-

ery. A wise little body, Mrs. Gage! The unresting old mind followed that hard thought and applied it like a blister to her memory. When had she ever in all her striving bestowed happiness? She could blight, she could punish, and even destroy; but not the other. A devastating self-judgment descended upon her; she who held the high, the low, and the middle justice over that strange and failing clan that called itself Ruyland was potent to ban—that power remained to her—but could no longer bless. That, she reflected, must be the beginning of the end of all autocracy.

At least and at last, there was sleep waiting for her. Perhaps that was the only real reward in a world of shams and falsified hopes. She walked slowly out on the rampart. In the distance a hillock loomed black, and through its leafage came a fitful gleam, the star of hope burning above the mound where Norval now lay next to Marcus, the self-destroyed beside the self-destroyed. . . . She had tampered with Norval's life too; and he had no better defense against her encroachments than to make death his ally. . . . She cried aloud into the night and staggered a little on the perilous wall. The lone light, unfailing of its message of hope through all the years, had gone out. . . . Or was it that her eyes had suddenly dimmed? She stood, trembling, in a lightless world. Then a great resonance of sound came up to her, alone above the city, and she lifted her head and breathed and moved and was one with life again.

The voices of Choral Three, youthful voices, care-free and strong and valiant, trumpets before Jericho, the voices of the new, besieging generation, fearless in front of the walls of privilege, of prejudice, of the long tradition of power, singing the way home through a changed and changeful world.

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